SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

of

The United Methodist Church 2025-2028

With official text and teaching exercises,
plus Our Social Creed

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

The Social Principles are a good faith response to what we believe God is already doing in our lives and in the public square. They are an expression of the common ground we share, reflecting our priorities and helping us learn about and advocate for vulnerable peoples and a vulnerable planet. The Social Principles express The United Methodist Church's official positions on societal issues, casting a vision for a just and equitable world.

Even though the Social Principles are "church words," their language may not be familiar to every member of The United Methodist Church. Part of our responsibility as members of the church is to unpack the Social Principles and to amplify what they actually mean in our own context and in the diverse contexts across the world.

The preface to the Social Principles emphasizes that they are "instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit." The Social Principles can be clearly marked signposts on our journey toward living fully into God's gracious love for the world; they give us clear direction. Sometimes, though, we may experience the Social Principles as a kind of road map on which the terrain is familiar, but some twists and turns are strange to us. Once we orient ourselves to this new geography, we are able to explore the course we are to take. The Social Principles may also show us how far we have come as a church as we look back at the ground we've covered. As United Methodists, we covenant to be a connectional church, to travel together even in the midst of our diversity, periodically adjusting our road map and, hopefully, moving closer toward God's vision for our world.

John Wesley invested in relationships with people most affected by societal inequities, making ministry to the poor or otherwise vulnerable communities a priority in the Methodist movement. Wesley pointed to the oppressive causes and effects of systemic poverty

and forged personal friendships with impoverished and neglected people. He promoted equity in health care, sustainable economic development, sustainable food production and distribution, access to a clean environment, and equitable access to education. He spoke out against abuses such as expanding imperialism and colonialism, mass incarceration, and the slave trade; he promoted religious tolerance and the dignity and sacred worth of indigenous peoples. These emphases illustrate the prophetic ministry of the early Methodist movement, responding to God's grace working in and on behalf of a wounded world. The Social Principles are a faithful and fresh expression of our Wesleyan missional mandate "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," or, as Wesley articulates, our call "to reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land" (¶ 120; "Minutes of Several Conversations" Q.3, in *The Works of John Wesley* [vol. 8; ed. T. Jackson; Baker, 1978], 299).

The placement of the Social Principles between "The Ministry of All Christians" and "Organization and Administration" in the 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline* reminds us that we cannot engage in ministry and mission without also engaging society and its ills collectively. While personal choices, habits, and commitments do change the world, organizations and structures provide us with a concrete means by which we live out our faith, seek justice, and pursue peace in ways that we cannot accomplish on our own. The Social Principles urge us not only to make a difference in the world but also (and as urgently) to build a different kind of world than the one in which we live.

As you read through the Social Principles, you may find yourself enthusiastically nodding in agreement, or you may vehemently disagree. Many people may feel overjoyed when they discover that what their conscience and their lived experience has taught them is actually in accord with the Social Principles, and others, even lifelong United Methodists, may genuinely feel defensive when a portion of the Social Principles sounds as if it is in conflict with their core convictions. You might even find yourself surprised to discover a topic you had not thought about very much. Perhaps your curiosity will lead you to explore such an issue in greater depth.

WHERE DO I START?

The 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline* describes the Social Principles as "the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to

speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions" (see preface to the Social Principles). The Social Principles are a catalyst for and a product of prayer. The Social Principles begin with holy conferencing by people of faith at General Conference, but they must be lived throughout the connection to have lasting value.

Read through the Social Principles and take a moment to consider from whom you first learned the principles that would guide your life. Was this a parent, grandparent, teacher, pastor, or neighbor? How have these ideals shaped your life? Ask yourself prayerfully, "Have there been instances where I was persuaded by someone's story, a new experience in my life, or by information I had not yet been exposed to that caused me to modify my perspective, to cultivate a different perspective, or to reevaluate a once firmly held conviction?"

As you pray, study, discuss, and put into practice the Social Principles, allow them to invite "deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice" with yourself, your communities, the church, and God (see preface). You may find yourself beginning to critically and constructively question some principles that at one time seemed unquestionably clear to you and to appreciate new principles that at one time seemed unrelated to you.

WHERE DO THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES COME FROM?

The Social Principles connect The United Methodist Church as we express our faith in collaborative practice. As tens of thousands of local churches and millions of United Methodists in the United States, Africa, Central and Southeast Asia, and Europe, we hold the Social Principles in common across our many diverse cultures, ethnicities, and national identities. At their best, the Social Principles articulate our ethical aspirations for the common good in our public policies and personal commitments. Through them, we seek to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and to desire for our neighbors what we desire for ourselves.

The United Methodist Church publicly and officially speaks about social issues through the Social Principles as adopted by the General Conference. Additional legislated statements approved by the General Conference, included in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* and *The Book of Resolutions of The United*

Methodist Church are anchored in our Social Principles. Only the General Conference, the church's highest policy-making body, has the authority to change the language in the Social Principles.

From the beginning, The United Methodist Church affirmed the gospel of Jesus Christ to be both social and personal. The predecessor to the Social Principles was written in 1908 and took the form of a Social Creed. The Social Creed was the first document of its kind written by a church. It was drafted during a historic period of rapid rural displacement and relocation, mass national migration, and unchecked corporate greed and industrial urbanization.

The Social Gospel movement, evangelical at its heart and inspired by Jesus' preaching of "the kingdom of God," was acutely aware of the brutality of deplorable working conditions, the social tensions arising from assimilating millions of European migrants, shifting cultural values, increases in addiction, inequitable economic practices in rapidly growing urban centers, and neglected rural regions in the United States. This movement advocated for a day of Sabbath rest, a living wage for workers, an end to sweatshop child labor, and recognition of human dignity and rights for persons marginalized by oppressive class divisions.

Inspired by the Wesleyan Methodist Union, recently organized in England, and the community organizing efforts of Methodist suffragettes Jane Addams and Mary McDowell, five Methodist Episcopal clergy established the Methodist Federation for Social Service. They included evangelist Frank Mason North from the New York Conference, author of the seminal Methodist hymn "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"; Ohio Wesleyan University president, Herbert Welch; publishing house editor Elbert Robb Zaring; and Cleveland pastor Worth Tippy and Chicago pastor Harry F. Ward, both of whom had officiated at far too many untimely funerals for meat packinghouse workers killed because of unsafe and inhumane factory working conditions.

Workers lacked advocates and a just means to organize and were ground down by fourteen-hour shifts and seven-day workweeks. Families were broken apart by absent or exhausted parents. Disabled workers were summarily dismissed; those who retired were left without a pension or health care; and children worked when they should have been at school or at play. At the same time, enormous wealth was generated and distributed primarily to factory owners, not the workers who made such production possible.

The new Social Creed was an eleven-point call to action presented as a platform at the General Conference. It became a public rallying cry for the church to live up to the demands of the gospel and to advocate for justice in the public square; it called for society to reform itself in light of the example of Christ.

The Methodist Episcopal Church stands:

- For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.
- For the principles of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.
- For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, injuries, and mortality.
- For the abolition of child labor.
- For such regulation of the conditions of labor for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.
- For the suppression of the "sweating system."
- For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, with work for all; and for that degree of leisure for all which is the condition of the highest human life.
- For a release for [from] employment one day in seven.
- For a living wage in every industry.
- For the highest wage that each industry can afford, and for the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.
- For the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills.

The Social Creed, which was first drafted on a Western Union notepad, was adopted without dissent on May 30, 1908, by the General Conference meeting in Baltimore, Maryland.

One-fourth of that General Conference's Episcopal Address was devoted to social justice (particularly to issues of child labor and the union movement) and the means by which the church ought to alleviate systemic poverty. Subsequently, the 1908 Social Creed was presented at the White House to President Theodore Roosevelt. Genuinely Wesleyan and thoroughly ecumenical, the Social Creed was adopted by the Federal Council of Churches (now the National

Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA) within two years of its initial publication.

HOW ABOUT THE 1972 SOCIAL CREED?

The two predecessor denominations to The United Methodist Church, The Evangelical United Brethren and The Methodist Church, brought to their union two distinct statements on social issues, "The Methodist Social Creed" of The Methodist Church and "Basic Beliefs Regarding Social Issues and Moral Standards" of The Evangelical United Brethren Church. Both creeds trace their origin to the first 1908 Social Creed, and although each was written with a particular audience in mind, together they presented the new church with a substantial mandate.

In 1968, these two statements were printed sequentially in the first United Methodist *Book of Discipline* under the new heading "Social Principles" with a preface explaining their common history and basic agreement. Bishop James S. Thomas, who chaired the Commission on Social Principles to rewrite the Social Creed, expressed the prevalent ethos and opportunity of that time: "The world is literally hanging under the threat of extinction. Indeed, a sense of impending doom seems almost prerequisite to an ecclesial statement of social witness, many of which are born of a sense of crisis."

The 1972 General Conference shared Bishop Thomas's resolve by declaring in its first edition of the new Social Creed and Social Principles that:

> The [global] unity now being thrust upon us by technological revolution has far outrun our moral and spiritual capacity to achieve a stable world . . . [presenting] the church as well as all people with problems that will not wait for answers. . . . This generation must find viable answers to these and related questions if humanity is to continue on this earth.

The title "Social Principles" was used for the first time in 1972. Back then, it included six major sections and concluded with the new Social Creed. The General Conference asked that "Our Social Creed" be read regularly in every congregation and used frequently in Sunday worship services. In 2008, the General Conference approved "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed" to be used especially in services of worship. The new litany was the result of several consultations on four continents, hosted by United Methodists in

the Philippines, Norway, the United States, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with input from across the worldwide church.

The Social Principles have evolved over time. The 2025-2028 Social Principles, like the 1972 Social Principles, still reflect our common theological task to be at once critical and constructive, individual and communal, contextual and practical. They demonstrate, in carefully articulated words, our commitments to and our relationships with the people who are most directly impacted by urgent social issues. The Social Principles reflect forthright opposition to specific choices and public policies, mediated agreements on a variety of positions, and clear affirmation of practices that favor justice, reconciliation, and peace.

When we are in meaningful, mutual relationships with others, the Social Principles and the Social Creed become far more than any one position we may take as a church—they become crucial illustrations of how we incarnate and embody the gospel in an ever more globalized, pluralistic church and society today.

THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES: A NEWLY REVISED DOCUMENT

With their inception, the original Social Principles were placed into eight sections: The Preface, The Preamble, The Natural World, The Nurturing Community, The Social Community, The Economic Community, The Political Community, and The World Community, and Our Social Creed. The Social Principles elaborated on specific timely issues, and they were intrinsically connected. Reading only one social principle without reading the others could have limited their collective importance.

Recognizing changing social issues and concerns, since the UMC's 1972 inception of the Social Principles, the General Conference 2012 called the General Board of Church and Society to engage in a process to revise them "with the goal of making them more succinct, theologically grounded, and globally relevant." The General Conference's direction was to review and edit the whole document to fully live into our identity as a global church.

Heeding General Conference's call, Church and Society spent the 2012-2016 quadrennium hosting a series of conversations to learn how the church used the Social Principles all over the world. United Methodists crossed borders and oceans to come together to listen to and dialogue about the Social Principles. Based on this time of deep listening, the General Conference 2016 called Church and Society to steward a whole revision of the Social Principles.

Listening sessions with thousands of United Methodists in Africa, Philippines, Europe, and the U.S. revealed:

- a deep appreciation for the Social Principles as a resource for mission and ministry
- a desire to clarify the worldwide relevance of the Social Principles
- a need to articulate a theological grounding of the principles.

Faithfully fulfilling the mandate from the General Conference 2016, the Board of Church and Society's board of directors in Spring 2019 endorsed the work of eight years and affirmed voices of thousands of United Methodists across the globe. They embraced the new document's succinct structure and sound theological grounding. The board overwhelmingly approved the document for adoption by the General Conference 2020.

With the postponement of the General Conference 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Revised Social Principles document was presented for adoption at the General Conference, Charlotte 2024. Leading up to General Conference, delegates reviewed the legislation submitted by Church and Society, which included the Revised Social Principles legislation.

After Church and Society Committee sessions at General Conference, the legislation created from a momentous eight-year effort was overwhelmingly adopted by General Conference Charlotte, 2024.

Our newly adopted Social Principles document contains six main sections: (1) the Preface, (2) the Preamble, (3) the Community of Creation, (4) the Economic Community, (5) the Social Community, and (6) the Political Community.

This current document integrates biblical and Wesleyan references throughout the text. The inclusion of the references in the document allows communities to teach, preach, and reflect together on how the principle relates to Scripture and our shared Wesleyan tradition. Furthermore, there are clear recommendations in the document for what the church and civil societies are called to do. This creates possibilities for churches to take clear action on a given social concern that is impacting communities.

Each principle is written in a concise and clear way. This allows all United Methodists from many different contexts to participate and engage the principles without relying on an expert to interpret

the document for the community. It is meant to be engaged by everyone.

The worldwide nature of the church is reflected in all areas of the document. All the sections of the document include language and topics reflective of the worldwide church's social concerns. In this way, United Methodists from different contexts can see both their own context reflected in the document as well as the contexts of other communities across the connection building a common language and understanding for stronger relationship and social witness. This document is for The United Methodist Church and its people to engage and take action for peace and justice of God's world.

The 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline* ¶ 1004 identifies the prime responsibility of the General Board of Church and Society is to seek the implementation of the Social Principles and other policy statements of the General Conference on Christian social concerns.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH SPEAK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES?

By adopting the Social Principles, the General Conference has officially spoken on a wide range of social issues for and to The United Methodist Church. As our church's "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task" explain, "The Social Principles provide our most recent official summary of stated convictions that seek to apply the Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic, and political issues."

The General Conference convenes every four years. (This four-year period is known as a quadrennium.) It is the only body that can speak officially for the church. The General Conference is composed of no more than one thousand delegates elected by various conferences in The United Methodist Church.

Every four years, any member, local church, conference, caucus, or general agency within The United Methodist Church may petition the General Conference to change any part of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, including the Social Principles. Prior to each General Conference, thousands of petitions are sent to the Secretary of the General Conference. Many of these petitions deal with some portion of the Social Principles.

At the beginning of the General Conference's session, most petitions relating to the Social Principles are given to the General Conference's Standing Legislative Committees on Church and Society.

Delegates in these two legislative committees divide further into smaller groups (subcommittees) to consider and make recommendations on each petition. The Standing Legislative Committees, acting on the recommendations of their subcommittees, deliberate and vote on these petitions, presenting their recommendations to the entire General Conference. The General Conference then accepts, amends, refers, or defeats these petitions. Once adopted by the General Conference, a petition becomes the official statement of The United Methodist Church.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES MAKE FOR ME?

You may find that someone you are close to, someone you care about, or even a new partner in ministry is directly impacted by one or more of the Social Principles. This could lead you to appreciate their life circumstances or their lived experiences in a new way. You may feel an urge to discover how a Social Principle affects them.

It could also be that you find some Social Principles at odds with your own lived experience and deeply held convictions. You may honestly hold beliefs that cannot easily be reconciled with one or more of the Social Principles. It would be natural to ask, "Do I need to accept all of the Social Principles in order to be a faithful member of The United Methodist Church?"

The practical answer is no. No one will come around with a copy of the 2025-2028 Social Principles and demand that you sign your name to the document to prove your loyalty to The United Methodist Church. The church believes the Social Principles are "a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit," and "they challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice."

We are to be in dialogue with and practice the Social Principles and to allow them to be instructional for us. We are invited to engage with the Social Principles prayerfully, giving thanks for God's grace given to all, while embracing courage, trust, humility, compassion, and hope with ourselves and one another. At the same time, we are to exercise our conscience and take seriously the implications of our faith as Christians through the eyes of our prophetic tradition. In that same prophetic sense, the Social Principles can,

should, and do challenge us to consider our attitudes and actions faithfully and critically.

As the Social Principles name, "Differences are a precious gift and daunting challenge" (see Preamble). As you engage in reflection and dialogue with yourself, God, and fellow disciples, it can be difficult to be present with someone who differs from you. Yet, it is important to recognize that the church from its earliest days as witnessed in the Gospels, Paul's letters, the Acts of the Apostles, and other New Testament texts, "diverse understandings and controversies on many matters" have arisen among God's people.

Yet, as the Preamble notes, we are called to cover differences or deny our struggles but engage with "courage and perseverance as we seek together to discern God's will." Rather than see differences and controversies as a barrier to community, we are invited to indeed accept difference and disagreements as "evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God's people" (the Preamble).

Part V
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

PREFACE

The United Methodist Church, including its predecessor bodies, has a long and rich history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles. In addition to carrying out acts of mercy, Methodism's founder, John Wesley, spoke out against the abuse of animals, the exploitation of poor people, and the treatment of human beings as chattel. Following in Wesley's footsteps, some early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners. Similarly, the United Brethren strongly condemned slavery.

In 1908, The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) was the first denomination to adopt a Social Creed, which called for "equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life." Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (South) and by The Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a statement of Social Principles in 1946 at the time of the uniting of The United Brethren and The Evangelical Church. In 1972, four years after the uniting in 1968 of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which was revised in 1976 and by each successive General Conference. In 2008, the General Conference added a Social Creed companion litany.

The Social Principles are not church law.[1] Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to

1. See Judicial Council Decisions 833, 1254.

speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions. The Social Principles are thus a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. Moreover, they challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice. (See ¶ 510.)

The Social Principles are also a living document. In recognition of the important changes that have taken place in The United Methodist Church over the past fifty years, including significant developments in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, the 2012 General Conference mandated that the Social Principles be revised to increase their theological grounding, succinctness, and global relevance. To accomplish this task, the General Board of Church and Society initially sought input and advice through consultations held in each of the five U.S. jurisdictions and a majority of the central conferences. The initial draft of the revised Social Principles was developed by six writing teams, whose members reflected the broad diversity of the church. Following this, an editorial revision team perfected additional drafts, based on feedback received via online surveys, extensive consultations with central and annual conferences, and comments solicited from United Methodist scholars, bishops, church bodies, and leaders across the denomination.

Special Editorial Notes

Throughout the Social Principles, the term "we" refers specifically to the General Conference and more broadly to members of The United Methodist Church. Unless otherwise stated, the term "church" refers specifically to The United Methodist Church rather than, for example, the church universal.

PREAMBLE

We, the people called United Methodists, affirm our faith in the living God, who created everything that is and called it good, and created human beings in God's own image. We give thanks for Jesus Christ, incarnation of God's love and our Savior, who redeems and heals our relationship with God. We trust in the movements of the Holy Spirit, transforming human lives and the whole creation. Further, we declare our faith that God's grace is available to all and

"nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created" (Romans 8:38-39).

From the beginning, God called us into covenant, bound with God, with one another, and with God's wonderfully diverse creation. God called us, further, to live lovingly in those relationships and to be stewards of God's created world, to tend God's garden. As we do our part in caring for creation, we allow all other parts of creation to fulfill their distinctive roles in the covenantal relationship with God (Genesis 2:7-15). According to Jesus' commandment, we are to love one another: "Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other" (John 13:34-35).

Created in God's image to live in covenant with God and the world, we honor the dignity of all beings and affirm the goodness of life. Knowing that we are held in God's grace, we are able to confess our sins. We have failed to love God with our whole hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have participated in unjust and life-destroying social systems. We have not been faithful stewards of God's creation, nor have we valued the role that every part of creation plays in the flourishing of God's world. Further, we have not followed Jesus Christ in sharing God's extravagant love and ministering with "the least of these" (Matthew 25:45). We have closed ourselves to God's guiding Spirit in our daily interactions with the human family and the earth. We have fallen short, and yet God loves us still.

We are grateful for God's forgiving and sanctifying love, given to us and to all and drawing us toward perfect love. By God's grace, we are called to be more Christlike, and thus to be merciful, just, and compassionate. Responding to that call, we seek to follow Jesus, who gave boundless love to all—the children, the outcast, the condemned and the confused. Jesus calls every generation to wholehearted discipleship: opening our hearts to the people we encounter daily; practicing compassion with our families and neighbors; honoring the dignity and worth of all people near and far; recognizing the systems that destroy human lives through poverty, war, and exclusion; and advocating justice and care in our churches, communities, and social structures. God calls us further to be stewards of creation, caring for the skies and waters, soil and plants, and all beings.

We give thanks for God's good gift of the church universal and for the Christian values embodied in the Wesleyan tradition and in The United Methodist Church. We recognize that the body of Christ has many parts, and all are valuable. Thus, we respect differences within Christ's body, including differences in understanding and expressing faith, in gifts and practices of ministry, and in life experiences, as shaped by ethnicities, cultures, communities, abilities, age, sexual orientation, and gender. We affirm our belief in the inestimable worth of each individual to whom God gives unique gifts. We renew our commitment to be faithful witnesses to the gospel in our daily lives and work and to magnify our witness as the church.

Differences are a precious gift and daunting challenge. They can stretch the church's capacity to live and minister faithfully. Yet God calls our church to difficult discipleship, with Jesus as our guide and the Spirit as our daily strength. With God's help, we accept the challenge to follow the high calling "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 NRSV). John Wesley's General Rules continue to inspire United Methodists to faithful practices that will do no harm, do good, and follow the ordinances of God (¶ 104, "The General Rules of the Methodist Church: The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies"). We recognize the challenges before the church to engage with honesty and compassion through deep listening, hard conversations and shared ministry, even when we do not agree on all matters.

We acknowledge that the church is a living body gathered from the many and diverse parts of the human community. Thus, unanimity of beliefs, opinion, and practice have never been characteristic of the church from the beginning. From its earliest times, as witnessed in the Gospels, Paul's letters, the Acts of the Apostles, and other New Testament texts, diverse understandings and controversies on many matters have been the reality. Therefore, whenever significant differences of opinion occur among Christians, some of which continue to divide the church deeply today, faithful Christians need to face their disagreements and even their despair, and not cover differences with false claims of consensus or unanimity. On the contrary, the church needs to embrace conflicts with courage and perseverance as we seek together to discern God's will. With that understanding and commitment, we pledge ourselves to acknowledge and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arise among us, accepting them as evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God's people.

Recognizing that God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we seek to center our lives and witness on God. We are confident that nothing can separate us from the grace of God, and that the social witness of the church is a testimony to that grace. With God's help, we pledge to share ministry and honor everyone's dignity, even when we disagree, to seek the mind of Christ, and to follow God's will in all things.

¶ 160. I. COMMUNITY OF ALL CREATION

PREFACE

The great lesson that our blessed Lord inculcates here . . . is that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God . . . who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe. (John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount")

We affirm that all creation belongs to God and is a manifestation of God's goodness and providential care. Human beings, nonhuman animals, plants, and other sentient and non-sentient beings participate in the community of creation, and their flourishing depends on the care of all God's creation. Rather than treating creation as if it were placed here solely for humanity's use and consumption, we are called to practice responsible stewardship and to live in right relationship with the Creator and with the whole of God's creation (Genesis 1:26-31; Matthew 6:26-30; Romans 8:22-24). We are also called to honor the role of every part of creation in healing the whole; thus we praise God with the whole of creation (Psalm 148) and recognize that we are part of complex ecosystems, all valued by God.

We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God's creation, celebrate earth's abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its Creator. We recognize we are interconnected members of complex ecosystems, intricate webs of life, all of which have their origins in God's gracious act of creation.

CREATION IN PERIL

We acknowledge that unsustainable human activities have placed the entirety of God's creation in peril. Further, we confess

that the degradation and wholesale destruction of the natural environment threatens unprecedented harm, bringing danger to human and nonhuman life alike.

A. Destruction of Ecosystems—Whether human beings are conscious of it or not, we are participants in and beneficiaries of complex natural ecosystems made up of myriads of symbiotic relationships between living organisms such as animals, plants, insects and microorganisms, and the physical environs they inhabit, including air, water, and soil.

Overconsumption, shortsighted policies, poor management of natural resources, and other unsustainable practices have severely impacted the fragile, natural ecosystems on which all of life depends. Too often, humankind has treated the rest of the created world as if it were disposable and allowed the destruction of other living organisms and their natural habitats to go unchecked. Further, the experiences and voices of people most at risk have largely been ignored.

B. Global Warming and Climate Change—Global warming and climate change are already creating extreme conditions that threaten the entirety of life on earth. Over-industrialization, widespread deforestation, and overreliance on fossil fuels are but some of the human activities that have contributed to the buildup of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere.

A sharp upsurge in greenhouse gases over past decades already has resulted in a steady rise in sea levels, growing acidification of the world's oceans, increased droughts and famines, and the intensification of extreme weather events. Climate scientists warn that the window of opportunity for reversing the negative effects of global warming and climate change is rapidly closing. Without concerted action by individuals, churches, communities, shareholders, businesses, governments, and international organizations, the negative effects will become irreversible.

C. Dependence on Fossil Fuels—The burning of fossil fuels, including coal, oil and, to a lesser extent, natural gas, is the greatest single contributor to the buildup of greenhouse gases and the consequent warming of earth's atmosphere. To reverse the current trajectory of global climate change, increased investments are needed in the research, development, and distribution of alternatives to fossil fuels, including, but not limited to, solar, wind, geothermal, and hydrogen-based energy sources.

In pursuing alternatives to fossil fuels, it is critical to avoid solutions that would worsen current problems or create new, unforeseen environmental challenges. Reliance on nuclear energy, for example, raises considerable concerns regarding the safe storage and containment of radioactive waste.

Similarly, recent proposals to reduce the buildup of greenhouse gases by geo-engineering earth's biospheres, including its land, air, and water, risk unpredictable side effects and the further destabilization of the natural ecosystems on which all life depends.

Inevitably, transitioning from an overreliance on fossil fuels will have adverse impacts on individuals and communities whose livelihoods are still heavily dependent on the production, sale, and distribution of these commodities. To the greatest extent possible, plans for developing and deploying alternative sources of energy should minimize negative financial impacts by investing in strategies that support people in successfully transitioning to new employment, strengthen the social safety net to deal with the loss of jobs and income, and provide ample educational and retraining opportunities.

STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

In Genesis 1, we read that God declares creation good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31), and we read in Genesis 2 that God "took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). The goodness of God's creation, and the value given to every part of it, call people to respect, protect, and care for the creation and all interrelated aspects of it.

A. Environmental Racism—We confess that the negative impacts resulting from the degradation of the natural world have fallen disproportionately on marginalized communities, including indigenous tribes, religious and ethnic communities, people living in poverty, and other vulnerable groups. We, therefore, pledge to resist all forms of environmental exploitation, neglect, and inequality. These practices condemn impoverished communities and developing countries to bear the brunt of hazardous environments, industrial pollution, toxic waste dumps, and urban decay. Such behaviors constitute environmental racism. We oppose policies and practices that relegate marginalized communities to a permanent underclass status and ignore indigenous and other sources of communal wisdom, which call for air, land, and water to be treated with profound respect.

Additionally, these groups suffer disproportionately from higher rates of asthma, cancer, birth defects, and other preventable medical conditions. These health problems are associated with pollutants and other chemicals in soil, water, and air that affect our drinking water, foods, and physical environment. We urge governments, businesses, and civic institutions to give priority to increasing access to prevention and treatment services.

We call for the institution of environmentally just principles, policies, and practices. We affirm the wisdom and agency of indigenous peoples and marginalized populations to determine for themselves practices and policies that best provide for their basic human needs, including food, water, shelter, and land free from toxic wastes. Self-determination entails, among other things, access to all pertinent information and significant decision-making power over industrial, agricultural, and other developments that have potential to wreak significant harm on land, air, and water.

B. Sustainable Policies and Practices—Sustainability is crucial to the development of ecologically sound policies and practices that seek to restore balance to the natural world and end the disruptive relationships between humanity and the rest of God's creation. Sustainable policies and practices aim to meet present human needs while ensuring that future generations have the resources they need to thrive. Sustainable policies and practices prioritize the protection of all forms of life and natural ecosystems, while supporting human beings to live in healthy balance with the earth.

We urge United Methodists to adopt sustainable habits and practices, including refraining from overconsumption, repurposing and recycling materials, avoiding products that pollute or otherwise harm the environment, and reducing the carbon footprints of individuals and families by reducing overall reliance on fossil fuels for heat, transportation, and other goods.

Recognizing that simply changing our personal habits will not be enough to reverse decades of environmental damage, the church supports local, regional, national, and international cooperative efforts aimed at redressing the ecological harms humans have wreaked on a global scale. Such cooperative efforts must include the development and enforcement of policies and practices that protect all sentient beings, and the promotion of sustainable economic development. We also encourage responsible consumption and urgent action against global warming and climate change.

C. Food Justice—Food systems that are ecologically sustainable, locally oriented, and equitably distributed are urgent priorities. We endorse policies and practices designed to ensure access to healthy nourishment and clean drinking water, especially for communities that have been subjected to environmental degradation or deprived of adequate resources to produce or purchase their own food.

We also affirm food sovereignty, which promotes the rights of all people to healthy, culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. We support local control of food production, which entails providing opportunities for local communities to participate meaningfully in decisions about the kinds of livestock to be raised and crops to be grown. We reject agricultural policies and practices that make food inaccessible to agricultural workers and the communities in which the food is produced. We advocate for strong protections of the land, food, and water rights of indigenous peoples.

We oppose the patenting of seed varieties and other organisms traditionally used in farming and agriculture. The rapidly expanding practice of patenting seed varieties and charging farmers for their use has reduced access to traditional crops and increased the indebtedness of subsistence and smaller-scale farms. Consequently, we support cooperative, open-source efforts aimed at making traditional seed varieties available to those who need them.

We also call for the creation of policies that reduce carbon-intensive agricultural methods, which increase climate change. Producers must be responsible for their adverse impact on food packaging, distribution, and transport, and seek the safety and well-being of agricultural and food processing workers.

D. Caring for All Creatures—We support the respectful and humane treatment of animals, who are crucial participants in God's ongoing creation and of inherent worth. We embrace biblical teachings that envision a time when humans and other creatures shall live in peace and harmony in a restored creation (Isaiah 11:6).

This commitment to respectful and humane treatment of animals means, for instance, putting in place protections to ensure that animals employed in agricultural and other forms of labor are free from cruel or abusive types of treatment and provided with ample rest and nourishment. Additionally, we oppose forcing animals to combat each other.

Animals raised for human consumption should be provided with healthy living conditions and sufficient food and water.

Animals raised for human consumption must likewise be reared in humane conditions and slaughtered in a manner that minimizes their overall suffering and pain.

With respect to creatures living in the wild, we urge cooperative efforts by international bodies, governments, civic institutions, churches, and concerned individuals and groups to end poaching and protect endangered and vulnerable species and preserve dwindling habitats. We decry the mass extinctions currently underway and call for the adoption of sustainable policies and practices that allow both animal and human life to flourish.

E. Protecting Space—God's creation encompasses not only the earth but the entire cosmos, including space. Our charge to be responsible stewards thus extends well beyond humankind's immediate environs and encompasses not only our own solar system but also other galaxies. Hence, we reject the exploitation, commodification, and militarization of space. We express our hope that the exploration and settlement of space, including the moon and other planetary bodies, take place peacefully and cooperatively, and in such fashion that the benefits and resources of any further exploration and development accrue to all humanity.

F. Affirming Science and Traditional Wisdom—We affirm the value of science and reason in providing deeper understandings of the origins and functioning of the cosmos. We also acknowledge that like all human endeavors, science can be misused and abused. We, therefore, urge all those involved in scientific investigations to adhere to the highest ethical standards in conducting research and applying their findings.

We also affirm the traditional wisdom found within indigenous communities, particularly the emphasis that native and first peoples have placed on living in harmony and balance with the earth and other animals as well as the need to protect the air, land and water.

¶ 161. II. THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

PREFACE

When the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being, and placed you in this world, [God] placed you here not as a proprietor, but a steward: As such [God] entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but the sole property of these still rests in [God], nor can be alienated from [God]. As you yourself are not your own, but God's, such is, likewise, all that you enjoy. (John Wesley, "The Use of Money")

As United Methodists, we profess that all we are and all that we possess, belong to God. We are temporary stewards of the resources and material goods that we have accumulated. In our financial dealings and relationships no less than other aspects of discipleship, we are compelled to serve God and neighbor in all we do.

Few biblical themes are as prominent or as numerous as the scriptural injunctions to stand in solidarity with "the least of these," including the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, and all other vulnerable members of society (Amos 5:7-13; Matthew 25:3-46; James 2:15-16). Accordingly, we pledge ourselves to the establishment of just, equitable, and sustainable economies that work for all.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

A. Globalization—We believe that global cooperation often contributes to human and environmental flourishing. However, we lament that globalization has created significant obstacles to achieving economic justice in too many instances. Globalization is marked by the growing integration of national economies and the emergence of multinational corporations that play an outsize role in global market systems.

While globalization undoubtedly has provided certain financial and other benefits, it has also undermined established wage and labor standards, weakened environmental protections, and accelerated the concentration of the world's wealth in the hands of a relative few. Additionally, globalization has increased overconsumption due to the ready access of cheaper goods and has undermined indigenous land rights in a rush to acquire raw materials necessary for expanded production.

As a church, we recognize the importance of creating just, equitable, and sustainable economies that benefit all members of society, especially marginalized and vulnerable peoples. Further, because globalization transcends the capacity of any single individual, community, or government to manage, we call on international bodies, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and others, to hold multinational corporations and national governments accountable to provide for economies that promote people over profits and protect the environment.

B. Poverty and Income Inequality—As United Methodists, we follow in the footsteps of our founder, John Wesley, who sought to improve the lives of those who suffered from debilitating conditions

such as poverty, starvation, illiteracy, imprisonment, slavery, addictions, and disease.

We decry the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the concentration of wealth in the hands of ever smaller percentages of the global population. We lament that too many of the world's people lack the basic resources necessary for survival and pledge ourselves to work toward the eradication of the roots and effects of poverty. We further lament the multiple causes of poverty, such as war, famine, diseases, and desertification.

We reject religious teachings that view the accumulation of wealth as a sign of God's favor and poverty as a sign of God's disfavor. We confess that we have not always heeded the words of Jesus, who preached good news to people living in poverty, taught that they were not far from God's coming reign, and challenged the rich young man to give up all that he had to follow him (Luke 6:20; Matthew 19:23-25).

We commit ourselves to be in active ministry with impoverished communities by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and by supporting their efforts to secure equal opportunities and meet human needs, including food, water, health care, and education. We reject preferential treatment in the church on the basis of wealth and income. We also commit to work toward eradicating unjust practices, policies, and systems that have condemned entire generations to live in unrelenting poverty.

C. Human Trafficking and Slavery—We condemn human trafficking and slavery as profound violations of the inherent dignity and worth of every person and of their fundamental rights related to autonomy, including the ability of every individual to make personal life choices. We understand slavery to be a repudiation of the basic Christian understanding that all people are created in the image of God.

Human trafficking entails the buying and selling of human beings for purposes of forced or indentured labor, including private and commercial sexual exploitation. We consider such trafficking to be abhorrent because it violates basic human rights and exploits the vulnerabilities of the weakest members of society. Those who are especially vulnerable include minor children and women, migrants, displaced people, and others living in poverty.

We support the abolition of human trafficking and slavery of any kind. We commit ourselves to work toward the elimination of the social and economic inequities that provide fertile ground for

the flourishing of these evils. We also reject the practice of using enslaved, indentured, imprisoned or coerced laborers in extractive industries or in the production of commercial goods. We urge individuals, families, congregations, and retailers to practice socially responsible consumerism by educating themselves about the sources of labor and the working conditions involved in production processes.

D. Graft, Bribery, and Corruption—We oppose graft, bribery, and other forms of corruption as breaches of the public trust and impediments to the creation of just and equitable societies. We deplore the involvement of government officials, business executives, church leaders, and other people of authority in these practices, not only because of their illegality but because such practices erode public confidence in legitimate forms of authority. Additionally, they subvert basic principles related to equality under the law and serve as obstacles to establishing just and equitable economies. The consequence is the diversion of public funding and manipulation of public contracts that undermine projects and services that could benefit the entire society.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

I entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, act up to the dignity of your calling! No more sloth! Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all people! (John Wesley, "The Use of Money")

Our commitment to achieving economic justice is rooted in the covenantal understanding that God's creation is meant to be shared by all humans and sentient beings. Just as the *oikos* or household served as the heart of the economy in ancient times, our belief in the inclusive nature of God's global household motivates our pursuit of just, equitable, and sustainable economies.

As members of God's *oikos* and followers of Jesus, who taught that we must "give to those who ask and not turn away from those who want to borrow," we embrace our charge to share the abundance of God's creation in just and equitable ways (Matthew 5:42). We, therefore, urge governments, businesses, and civic associations to ensure that individuals, families, and communities not only survive, but also thrive.

A. Responsible Consumerism—Socially responsible consumerism is critical in life today. We urge individuals, families, and congregations to adopt life habits that reduce unnecessary waste, promote just and equitable compensation, promote sustainability, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

We urge consumers to exercise their economic power to encourage the manufacture of goods that are beneficial to humankind while avoiding those produced through exploitative labor practices. We support peaceful and nonviolent efforts, including boycotts, letter-writing campaigns, appeals to stockholders, and divestiture, as effective means of expressing collective dissatisfaction with companies that engage in unjust or harmful practices. We also call upon stockholders and employees to exercise their moral agency by seeking to influence corporate policies. When such actions are necessary, we urge that they be in alignment with the teachings of the gospel and the church's commitment to the dignity and worth of all beings.

In recognition that developed nations now consume the vast majority of the world's natural resources, we also support international policies and cooperative efforts aimed at producing economies that are more just and that promote human flourishing.

B. Farming and Agricultural Production—The emphasis placed on the necessity of "daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:11) serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of daily sustenance and the crucial roles that farming and other forms of agricultural production play in meeting the nutritional needs of a rapidly expanding global population. We, therefore, call for the establishment of policies and practices to guarantee the safety and security of these lifelines and to ensure that the decision-making related to agricultural production, and the benefits of that production, are open to all.

We support local and family farms and appreciate their value in feeding the vast majority of the world's population. We deplore the growing monopolization of the means of agricultural production by corporations and large agribusinesses. These monopolies raise significant concerns about the loss of local input and decision-making power and accelerate the degradation of ecosystems, including soil, water and forests.

Large agribusinesses, in particular, have exacerbated practices that reserve the best lands for the exclusive production of exportable crops, rather than using those resources to feed local populations. They also have accelerated the depletion of the soil through monocultural farming, increased the release of methane gas by

livestock, contributed to environmental degradation, and exposed workers to unsafe levels of pesticides and herbicides.

We endorse measures that protect the continued operation of local, family, and communal farms and call for the elimination of government programs that disproportionately benefit large corporations and agribusinesses. We support efforts to restore local input and decision-making regarding the use of land, the production of crops, the raising of livestock, and the protection of local habitats in hopes that this will enable local communities to reap more of the benefits of farming and other forms of agricultural production.

We urge farmers, large and small, to engage in sustainable practices that preserve the integrity of the food chain, ensure that farmworkers and other laborers are justly compensated, and protect the natural environment.

C. The Dignity of Work—We believe in the dignity of work, not merely as a means of subsistence, but as a way for individuals to contribute to the flourishing of their families and contribute to the common good. This affirmation of the dignity of work leads us to support the right to safe and secure working conditions, free from health and safety hazards. We also endorse the establishment and enforcement of policies that guarantee workers fair and equitable compensation, sometimes referred to as a living wage. We recognize that full employment is a distant dream in many communities and cultures and, in such situations, the challenges in establishing workers' rights are significant. Still, the church advocates for the fair and decent treatment of workers and supports policies that expand opportunities for more people to find meaningful work with just compensation and benefits.

We oppose the widespread reliance on child labor, which forces children under the age of eighteen (18) to relinquish their childhoods and forgo educational opportunities, and instead to work in commercial agriculture, industrial manufacturing, or extractive industries.

We support workers' freedom of association, including their rights to organize unions, to engage in collective bargaining, and to protest both unsafe working conditions and unjust employment policies and practices. We also support workers' right to strike. We reject efforts to permanently replace workers engaged in strikes or to make organized work stoppages illegal.

We support measures that limit the length of both the workday and workweek and endorse policies that guarantee every worker

have been exhausted, other effective strategies include direct dialogue, joint shareholder actions, and boycott and divestment efforts.

¶ 162. III. THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY

PREFACE

When it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is! It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good which is to be done; rather, before the question is raised, it has done the deed, and keeps on doing it. [One] who is not active in this way is a [person] without faith. (Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*)

The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. (John Wesley, Preface, Hymns and Sacred Poems*)*

As United Methodists, we affirm that human beings are made for God and for one another (Genesis 1:26-27, 31; Philippians 2:3-8). We live out our lives, grow in the faith, and engage in acts of discipleship and witness in the context of a variety of interconnected communities, including families, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and the broader society.

The church is called to be a distinctive community, marked by preaching of the gospel, studying of Scripture, breaking of bread, and witnessing to the power of redemption in the midst of a broken world. We respond to God's call in the world by giving witness to the transformative power of the gospel, engaging in acts of mercy, and striving toward the attainment of justice and peace as hallmarks of God's coming reign. In all of these efforts, Christians are reminded that diverse as we may be, we are all a part of the same body under the sovereignty of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

THE NURTURING COMMUNITY

A. The Family—We recognize that families come in a variety of sizes and forms, and acknowledge their significant role in nurturing the physical, moral, and spiritual development of children, youth, and adults. Nurture and support are fundamental to the proper functioning of families. We, therefore, urge all family members to treat one another with love and respect. We also encourage parents and other caregivers to exercise appropriate diligence and care, raising their children in ways that promote their physical, spiritual, emotional, and moral growth.

Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We lament that in some instances, birth parents are unable or unwilling to fulfill their caregiving obligations. Under these circumstances, we applaud the willingness of extended families and foster and adoptive parents to step in as primary nurturers. Even in these situations, however, we recognize the trauma that may be caused by separating children from their families of origin and urge that such actions be handled justly, sensitively, and compassionately. Where appropriate and possible, we encourage open adoption so that children may know all information relevant to them, both medically and relationally.

B. Single People—We celebrate the contributions of single people and reject all social practices that discriminate against them or subject them to bias and prejudice. We respect the decisions of single people regarding marriage and we affirm the many ways in which they may participate in family and community life. This profound sense of respect extends to single parents. We recognize the extra burdens and challenges that single parenthood entails and offer our love, support, and care in the fulfillment of this special vocation.

C. Human Sexuality—We affirm human sexuality as a sacred gift and acknowledge that sexual intimacy contributes to fostering the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of individuals and to nurturing healthy sexual relationships that are grounded in love, care, and respect.

Human sexuality is a healthy and natural part of life that is expressed in wonderfully diverse ways from birth to death. It is shaped by a combination of nature and nurture: heredity and genetic factors on the one hand and childhood development and environment on the other. We further honor the diversity of choices and vocations in relation to sexuality such as celibacy, marriage, and singleness.

We support the rights of all people to exercise personal consent in sexual relationships, to make decisions about their own bodies and be supported in those decisions, to receive comprehensive sexual education, to be free from sexual exploitation and violence, and to have access to adequate sexual health care.

D. Marriage—Within the church, we affirm marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith, an adult man and woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age, into union with one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.

While The United Methodist Church does not recognize marriage as a sacrament, we celebrate and cherish this union as an expression of the couple's faith, grounded in their relationship with God and one another. Marriage thus reflects a continued willingness to grow together in Christ and a commitment to cultivate a covenantal bond that encompasses intimacy, grace, and love.

As members of the larger society, we also affirm the importance of civil marriage, the legal recognition of domestic unions by the state. Such legal recognition is vital for guaranteeing family stability and the orderly regulation of inheritances, and for providing assurance that spouses and children are afforded all the rights, benefits, and protections to which they are entitled.

1. *Child Marriage*—We reject marital relationships with children and youth under the age of eighteen (18), even in places where such relationships are culturally or legally permissible. Child marriages and premature sexual activities disrupt the normal course of emotional, biological, and social development of minor children. For underage girls, in particular, premature sexual activities—and the pregnancies resulting from such activities—can permanently damage internal organs, lead to lifelong medical problems, and preclude other opportunities in their lives. Waiting until a more appropriate age to wed offers better opportunities for children and youth to grow into healthy adulthood and become full, contributing members of society. We therefore believe that young people should be of legal age to give their consent before entering into marriage.

2. *Polygamy*—We cannot endorse the practice of polygamy, which entails living in relationship with multiple spouses. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the forced dissolution of such relationships presents significant problems. All too often, the women and children forced out of polygamous relationships find themselves cast into abject poverty with no means of support.

We, therefore, urge church leaders, when dealing with the dissolution of polygamous relationships, to exercise the utmost care and to prioritize considerations related to the continued health and well-being of dependent women and children.

We reject attempts to ostracize families who are or have been in polygamous relationships, especially women and children, or deny them access to the ministries of the church, including participation in the sacraments. Instead, we urge pastors and congregations to extend the same gracious welcome and hospitality to all those in need.

3. *Divorce*—We recognize that divorce may become a regrettable but necessary alternative when marital relationships are strained beyond repair or become destructive or when spouses become irrevocably estranged. In such instances, we advise married couples to seek appropriate counseling and, if divorce proceedings become unavoidable, to conduct them in a manner that minimizes detrimental impacts on all family members.

Fidelity to the marriage covenant does not require spouses to remain in a physically or mentally abusive relationship. We do not support efforts to withhold the church's ministries from divorced people or to deny them opportunities for leadership in the church, whether clergy or lay. We urge pastors and congregations to provide ministries and programs that support divorced people in overcoming social and religious stigmas that they too often face. Divorce does not preclude remarriage.

OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES

A. Substance Abuse, Alcohol, and Tobacco—Substance abuse refers both to the devastating psychological and physiological effects of dependence and to the broader social consequences of abuse. In responding to the widespread realities of substance abuse disorders, we begin with the recognition of the devastating impacts of addiction and of the misuse and abuse of legal and illegal substances in the lives of individual users, extended families and entire communities.

In many parts of the world, opioid and other substance abuse has reached crisis proportions. The church supports programs and policies that comprehensively address the causes and cures of debilitating addictions. We call upon society to refrain from judging people who are addicted and upon governments at all levels to provide resources commensurate with the scope of the problem.

In recognition of the devastation that substance abuse has wreaked on individuals, families and entire communities, we urge United Methodists to refrain from the use of any licit or illicit intoxicants, drugs, or other substances that foster addiction, impair mental faculties and physical abilities, and result in long-lasting damage to individuals, families, and communities.

Regarding the consumption of alcohol, we acknowledge the historic United Methodist stance on abstinence as a safeguard against mental, physical, and spiritual harms caused by excessive drinking. Consequently, we urge those who choose to consume alcoholic beverages, including wine and beer, to do so wisely and in moderation.

Another important consideration is the impact of such actions on those struggling to recover from alcohol use and abuse.

Due to mounting medical evidence regarding the highly addictive nature and serious health consequences of direct or indirect ingestion or inhalation of nicotine and other chemicals found in commercial tobacco products, the church recommends complete abstinence. In making this recommendation, we recognize the difficulties in overcoming nicotine addiction and urge congregations to find ways to provide meaningful support to those who decide to stop using nicotine.

B. Bullying and Other Forms of Violence—We decry all forms of bullying, which consists of unwanted and aggressive behaviors toward children, youth, and adults, including verbal taunts, physical violence, emotional manipulation, and social intimidation. When specifically targeted toward children and youth, bullying stunts emotional and intellectual development and turns schools, neighborhoods, and virtual or online settings into dangerous and unsafe environments. Bullying often has long-term traumatic effects on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of its victims. We support the enactment of policies aimed at safeguarding children, youth, and adults from bullying. In situations involving minor children and youth, we urge the development and implementation of anti-bullying policies that take into consideration the ongoing maturational processes of both the victims and perpetrators of bullying.

C. Colonialism, Neocolonialism, and Their Consequences—We acknowledge that the tangled and complex legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism hang heavily over the global fellowship of United Methodists. Colonialism refers to the practice of establishing full or partial control of other countries, tribes, and peoples through conquest and exploitation. Neocolonialism continues the historic legacy of colonialism by maintaining economic, political, and social control of formerly colonized nations and peoples.

Some of us belong to countries and groups that have richly benefited from the subjugation of whole peoples and from the seizure of lands and other resources. Others of us live in countries or are a part of communities that continue to struggle with the ongoing history and impacts of all forms of colonialism, including social, economic, and political instability; widespread malnutrition; illiteracy; disease; and continuing infringements on indigenous and tribal lands.

We recognize that far from being innocent bystanders, the church has often been deeply involved in colonialism and neocolonialism.

We, therefore, call on individuals and congregations to educate themselves about the troubling legacies of colonialism and, where appropriate, to seek repentance for our continued involvement. We urge United Methodists to find ways to support those still suffering from colonial legacies, including tangible acts of reparation and active support for sustainable development initiatives.

D. Death with Dignity—We recognize that every mortal life ends in death, and we affirm that God's abiding love and care remain with us as we transition from life to death to greater life. These affirmations, together with our expressed commitment to the sacred worth of every human being, lead us to insist that individuals be treated with dignity and respect as they undergo the dying process.

This emphasis on death with dignity means that the choices of individuals and families must be heard and respected, the use of medical technology must be measured and appropriate, and any unnecessary pain and suffering must be minimized. We affirm the right of people in the process of dying to participate actively in the decision-making process. As communities of faith, we are called to support individuals and families as they confront the realities of suffering and death. In sensitive and caring ways, we bear witness to God's enduring love and grace, even when they cannot be felt or experienced in an immediate way.

1. *Faithful Care of Dying People*—Our approach to death and dying is framed by our belief in the inherent dignity and worth of human beings, our concern for patient autonomy, and the affirmation that our lives ultimately belong to God. Within this framework, we strongly support efforts to empower patients and their loved ones to make informed decisions about continued treatment or end-of-life decisions that are consistent with applicable legal statutes and established medical protocols and standards.

Such informed decision-making may lead patients and their loved ones to choose to continue treatments that hold the promise of significant health improvements or enhanced quality of life. Conversely, such decisions may also lead patients or loved ones to discontinue medical interventions that cease to be of substantive benefit.

We affirm the benefits of palliative care in instances where a decision is made to stop other treatments. Palliative care stresses the importance of making patients as comfortable as possible, minimizing pain and suffering, and allowing the dying process to proceed unhindered. We also endorse the creation of advance medical

directives, which clearly express the preferences of patients should they become incapacitated and unable to advise their doctors.

2. *Euthanasia and Suicide*—Our conviction that life is a sacred gift, along with persistent questions and concerns about potential abuse, lead us as a church to oppose both euthanasia and suicide while continuing our ministries of mercy with families who are affected by such actions. Euthanasia, also known as mercy killing and physician-directed or physician-assisted suicide, occurs when doctors or other health professionals make lethal doses of medications available to terminally ill patients, or, in some cases, directly administer or supervise the taking of such medications.

Suicide refers more generally to actions taken by individuals to end their own lives. The motivations for suicide often involve depression and other forms of mental illness, including substance abuse. Worldwide, suicide attempts often occur after significant personal or familial crises, including the loss of livelihoods, forced migration and displacement, cultural oppression, and prolonged exposure to bullying and other acts of violence.

While euthanasia or suicide cannot be condoned, we humbly confess the inadequacy of the church understanding and response. We urge congregations to educate themselves regarding the complex set of motivations and factors underlying these practices. Recognizing that final judgment lies in God's hands rather than our own, we reject attempts to deny the ministries and services of the church to those who die by euthanasia or suicide or to their grieving families and other loved ones.

We believe that suicide does not bar people from God's grace, which is all-sufficient. We urge pastors and local congregations to establish appropriate protocols in responding to people considering suicide and the survivors of suicide attempts. Such protocols should include referrals to experienced counselors or medical professionals. Rather than ostracizing or condemning survivors or family members affected by suicide, we urge pastors and congregations to provide compassion and support to these people.

E. Gambling—We reject the practice of gambling because it focuses society's attention on the acquisition of monetary goods at the exclusion of all else and enriches a small minority at the expense of the larger majority. For too many people, gambling becomes a devastating and addictive practice that jeopardizes the economic well-being of both gamblers and their families.

We acknowledge that in some locales, First Nation, American Indian, and aboriginal peoples have opened gambling resorts and establishments as an act of self-determination and a crucial step toward economic survival. Rather than condemning such actions, we recognize that the church's role is to encourage dialogue and education regarding the hopes and aspirations of these communities and to develop a deeper understanding of their histories and their continued quests for self-determination and survival.

We vow to work toward the eradication of poverty and a more equitable distribution of financial benefits as a constructive strategy to reduce the financial appeal of organized gambling, which includes lotteries, casinos, and online games of chance.

F. Gender Equality and Diversity—We support both gender equality and gender diversity as important goals for ensuring that the aspirations of women and girls are taken seriously and guaranteeing that paid positions and leadership opportunities are distributed equally for all. We decry the persistence of sexism and misogyny in the church through its practices and theological teachings, as well as in the broader society. We regret that such prejudices have too often led to the denigration and dismissal of women's leadership and participation.

Consequently, we reject any beliefs, policies or practices that envision women and men as unequal in either religious or secular settings. We exhort congregations, pastors, boards of ordained ministries, bishops, and other church officials to implement concrete efforts to nurture and promote the leadership of all people, regardless of gender. We also urge governments, businesses, and civil society to enact laws and policies to ensure that all members of society are afforded equal access, opportunities, and protections.

G. Media and Communication Technologies—We support freedom of public expression, which encompasses freedom of the press and the right of all societal members to share their perspectives and opinions. We also insist that all media companies operate with civility and respect and adhere to established journalistic standards. We affirm the positive roles that media and communication technologies play in educating the general public, holding government and other societal leaders accountable, and promoting the common good.

We are concerned about media monopolies and the tendency of media control to rest in the hands of a few large corporations,

and we encourage individuals, communities, and governments to be vigilant in the enforcement of antitrust policies.

We also recognize that, like every other human endeavor, the media can be used by unscrupulous people to manipulate public opinions, distort facts, and spread misinformation, hostility and fear. We deplore the proliferation of hate speech across social media, broadcast and print news, and other platforms, and we call upon citizens and regulators to do all in their power to eliminate it. We also encourage individuals to take care when expressing their views on social media, recognizing the need for compassion and the harm that can be done to others when such compassion is lacking.

Further, media and other communication technologies lack adequate or diverse representation of marginalized communities, including women, ethnic groups, people with disabilities, impoverished people and others. We believe that media and communications technologies should be open and accessible to all, foster norms that promote civility and respect, and protect the dignity and worth of all people, including society's most vulnerable.

H. Pornography—We strongly oppose pornography and lament its destructive impact upon cultures, families, and individuals. Pornography is an affront to our deeply held conviction that human sexuality is a precious gift from God. The issue of pornography is one that has dramatically impacted many both within and outside of the worldwide church. Though graphic images have been available for centuries, the widespread prevalence and availability of sexually explicit and aggressive materials today have led to an increasing problem of addiction for many, including young people who have come of age with the internet in their homes and on mobile devices. We call upon all United Methodists to support actions to develop effective societal and governmental policies to eradicate child pornography as well as adult exploitation and enslavement. We further call on the church to offer nonjudgmental support, rehabilitation, and care to those who have been affected by the harmful impact of pornography on their lives.

I. Medical Experimentation and Research—We support medical experimentation and research procedures that hold the potential of eradicating illness and disease and/or extending and improving the quality of human life. We insist that medical experimentation, including genetic engineering, be performed within established bioethical parameters. These parameters, which derive from the physician's responsibility to do no harm, include guarantees of patient

autonomy and informed consent; assurances that the benefits and risks of medical experimentation are equitably distributed among various societal groups; the promise of significant benefits for patients involved in such experiments; and, to a lesser extent, the opportunity to significantly advance the medical field.

We advocate for meticulous oversight of all forms of medical experimentation to ensure that the highest ethical parameters are applied. We urge strong cooperation among governments, academic institutions, corporate researchers, and the medical profession to enforce prevailing medical research standards. Additionally, we insist on due diligence to ensure that people living in poverty, including those in developing countries and less affluent societies, are not overrepresented or underrepresented in medical studies and then denied the benefits derived from the studies.

J. Organ Donation and Transplantation—We strongly support organ donation as an expression of Christ's admonition to love one's neighbor. A worldwide shortage of transplantable organs means that hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men are subjected to needless pain and premature death. In light of this, United Methodists who are willing and able to participate are encouraged to volunteer through organ donation registries.

We believe that all donations must be voluntary and must be conducted in safe and secure medical environments in which the health, well-being, and privacy of both donors and recipients are protected. Further, we consider the buying and selling of organs and blood, including those obtained through theft and coercion, to be profound violations of the inherent dignity of human life and of moral precepts that dictate against human beings being treated as commodities.

We urge governments and medical organizations to adopt laws and policies promoting organ donation while protecting vulnerable populations from abusive practices and ensuring that transplantable organs are equitably distributed regardless of a potential recipient's social standing.

K. Reproductive Health and Abortion—We support the provision of comprehensive, age-appropriate education for sexual health, as well as access to consistent, effective, and affordable contraception. We also affirm ministries and initiatives aimed at promoting reproductive health and enhancing the quality of life for women and girls. Because of the dangers and risks involved in childbearing, we believe that women and girls should have consistent access

to gynecological care. We, therefore, urge governments, businesses, churches, and other civic institutions to make access to prevention education, medical checkups, treatment, and counseling high priorities for women and girls of childbearing age.

Our commitment to the sanctity of human life makes us reluctant to condone abortion. We unconditionally reject it as an acceptable means of birth control or a mechanism for gender selection and other forms of eugenics. We support measures requiring parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood, except in cases of alleged incest.

We oppose late-term or partial-birth abortion, a process also known as dilation and extraction. We call for the end to this practice, except when the life of the mother is in danger, no other medical treatments are feasible, or when severe abnormalities threaten the viability of the fetus. We recognize that these and other tragic conflicts of life with life may justify decisions to terminate the life of a fetus. In these limited circumstances, we support the legal option of abortion and insist that such procedures be performed by trained medical providers in clean and safe settings.

We urge all those considering abortions to seek appropriate medical advice and pastoral counseling and to engage in searching, prayerful inquiries into other alternatives, such as making babies available for adoption. We pray for those facing unintended pregnancies and offer our prayers and support as they attempt to discern God's will and seek God's wisdom and guidance. Regardless of the circumstances in which someone might get an abortion, we do not condone bullying or shaming people for their decisions or actions.

We acknowledge that young women of childbearing age frequently report that they lack the ability to make meaningful life choices or exercise effective control over their own lives. We challenge pastors, congregations, campus ministries, and others to be at the forefront of efforts to empower these young women. Additionally, we support resource centers that offer compassionate care and help women explore alternatives to abortion.

We recognize that access to reproductive health services is too often limited by economic factors. Women living in poverty are often unable to make choices about when to become pregnant or about the size of their families. They also lack access to safe prenatal and postnatal care. Such a lack of agency perpetuates cycles of poverty by restricting the ability of women to participate in the

workforce and by increasing the strain on scarce family resources. We support policies and programs that extend reproductive health services to women in economically challenged areas.

We support the use of a variety of reproductive strategies for those desiring to have children, including fertility treatments, in vitro fertilization (IVF), embryo or sperm donation, surrogacy, and others. We believe the decision whether to use reproductive alternatives is best left to those considering the use of these options, in consultation with their health care providers. In all instances, the use of reproductive alternatives should be in keeping with the highest ethical standards, prioritizing the health and well-being of both women and children.

L. Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Tribalism—We condemn racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, and any ideology or social practice based on false and misleading beliefs or ideologies that one group of human beings is superior to all other groups of human beings. Additionally, we utterly reject laws, policies, and social practices that marginalize, discriminate, and/or encourage the use of violence against individuals, communities, or other social groups based on perceived racial, ethnic, or tribal differences.

We call on congregations and on pastors, bishops, and other church authorities to educate themselves about the root causes and manifestations of racism, ethnocentrism, and tribalism within communities of faith and to develop strategies for overcoming these kinds of social divisions. We likewise urge governments, businesses, and civil society organizations to renounce statements, policies, and actions aimed at promoting exclusion, discrimination, and violence.

M. Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Assault—Recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of all people, we condemn sexual harassment, abuse, and assault and consider them grave violations of the established behavioral norms within the church as well as our larger society. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks, gender-based remarks or physical advances made in workplaces, professional settings, or social situations.

Sexual abuse or molestation entails unwanted sexual activity perpetrated through the use of force or threats, or by taking advantage of those who are unable to give consent or those in vulnerable situations with unequal power. Sexual assault includes all threats and forms of forcible sexual contact or bodily harm, including rape. We particularly deplore the sexual exploitation of children and

youth and recognize that any sexual abuse is especially heinous and damaging when it occurs in the context of the church.

We urge pastors, congregations, and other church bodies to adopt clear policies and practices to prevent or address instances of sexual harassment. These policies and practices should include required training for all clergy and church staff, printed guidelines on what constitutes sexual harassment, a safe and confidential reporting method, and a clear process for resolving grievance complaints, including escalating penalties that end with the dismissal of repeat offenders who fail to correct their behavior.

We advocate the development and implementation of comprehensive policies and practices in relation to cases of suspected sexual abuse and assault, especially when such cases involve minor children or others incapable of giving their consent. Even unsubstantiated reports of assault or abuse must be investigated immediately. Further, we urge pastors and congregations to comply fully with any legal statutes governing such matters and to be cognizant of any legal obligations as a mandated reporter.

¶ 163. IV. THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY

PREFACE

"Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment." Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. "Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable," or honorable; "if there be any virtue, if there be any praise," they are all comprised in this one word,—love. (John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart")

Our involvement in political systems is rooted in the gospel imperative to love our neighbors, to do justice, and to care for the vulnerable. As United Methodists, we acknowledge that love requires responsible political action and engagement aimed at the betterment of society and the promotion of the common good. We acknowledge that such political engagement demands humility and mindfulness of our own complicity in perpetuating injustice. It also necessitates compassion, prayer, and a willingness to discern God's guidance.

We believe in the inherent worth of all people, which is established through God's gracious act of Creation and most fully revealed in the power of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The

understanding that people are created in the image of God is a central theme in John Wesley's teachings.

We further believe that God calls all members of the human family to recognize and protect the dignity and worth of all people and to work for the well-being of all God's creation. We, therefore, support structures in the church and in civil society that honor the basic freedoms and rights of all human beings and protect God's creation. In particular, we affirm the important work of the United Nations in promoting peace and security, championing human dignity and human rights, and advocating for sustainable development.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Church and Governments—We affirm that both church and state have vital and distinct roles to play in relation to the larger society. Though the formal relationships between religious communities and governments vary from country to country, we generally affirm the independence and integrity of both institutions, and we advocate for a relationship of mutual respect in which neither institution seeks to dominate or unduly influence the other.

We affirm that every form of government stands under God's judgment and must therefore be held accountable for protecting the innocent, guaranteeing basic freedoms and liberties, protecting the natural world, and establishing just, equitable, and sustainable economies.

We urge those elected or appointed to public posts or holding other positions in government to act as responsible leaders and stewards of the authority and resources entrusted to them. We call on all government officials to aspire to the highest standards of professionalism, honesty, and integrity. Furthermore, we urge all governments to adopt policies and practices that guarantee accountability and transparency in fostering and maintaining the trust of the public.

We reject governmental use of threats, extortion, unlawful detentions, extrajudicial killings, and other forms of coercion to silence political opponents and those objecting to unlawful or immoral government policies and practices. In keeping with international laws and ordinances, we vehemently protest the use of torture, slavery, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression by any government and call for the strictest international sanctions to be imposed in such cases.

While we do not believe churches should affiliate with particular political parties, we do encourage churches to speak out boldly on social issues from a gospel perspective. We further believe churches have a right and a responsibility to educate and equip their members to be effective advocates for justice in the wider world.

B. Civil Disobedience—We support those who, acting under the constraints of moral conscience or religious conviction and having exhausted all other legal avenues, feel compelled to disobey or protest unjust or immoral laws. We urge those who engage in civil disobedience to do so nonviolently and with respect for the dignity and worth of all concerned. We also appeal to all governmental bodies, especially the police and any other institutions charged with protecting public safety, to provide appropriate training and to act with restraint and in a manner that protects basic rights and prevents emotional or bodily harm to those engaged in civil disobedience.

C. Restorative Justice—The Gospels place a premium on the restoration of right relationships (Matthew 18:15-20). When relationships are violated or broken through crime or wrongdoing, such restoration is critically important. We, therefore, urge governments to develop systems that emphasize restorative justice, which requires people who have committed crimes to make amends for their offenses, and allows victims, if they elect to do so, to share with offenders how they have been harmed. Restorative justice seeks to prioritize the victim and the victim's family. It also seeks to repair damages, right wrongs, and bring healing to the victim, the offender, families, and the community.

We urge congregations, governments, and businesses to support diversion programs that allow those who have committed offenses to receive counseling, education, skills training, community service, and other assistance to help them become fully contributing members of society. We encourage citizens to partner with law enforcement personnel in local communities to create alternatives to practices that emphasize retribution rather than restoration.

D. The Death Penalty—Our commitment to the inherent dignity and worth of every person and our historic stance as United Methodists compels us to oppose capital punishment and the imposition of the death penalty. The death penalty is a sentence of execution imposed upon a legally convicted individual.

Tragically, the death penalty compounds the loss of human life with the deliberate taking of another life. Additionally, the administration of the death penalty disproportionately impacts people who

live in poverty, those who are uneducated, people who live in marginalized racial and ethnic communities, and people with mental impairments. Further, modern advances in technology have shown that a significant number of people are wrongly convicted of the crimes with which they have been charged. Such injustices call us to question the fair application of the death penalty and its congruence with the fundamental right to fair and equal treatment under the law.

We, therefore, call for the abolition of the death penalty and urge individuals and congregations to educate themselves about the historical stance of The United Methodist Church and its predecessors, especially The Evangelical United Brethren Church. Further, we ask pastors and congregations to commit themselves to minister to those who have lost loved ones to violent crimes and to support families without judgment as they navigate the competing demands of justice, compassion, and healing.

E. Criminal Justice—John Wesley campaigned tirelessly for improved conditions for prisoners. Once, in a period of nine months, he preached at least sixty-seven times in various jails. He bemoaned the deplorable conditions under which most prisoners in his day lived. Claiming this heritage, we affirm the rule of law, the guarantee of civil liberties and rights, and equal access to justice for all people. We condemn discriminatory enforcement or any abuse of power for reasons of tribe, ethnicity, native language, country of origin, economic disadvantage, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or citizenship status. We encourage systemic monitoring for prejudice and bias in all criminal justice systems. We further support access to competent legal representation for people who are accused and/or convicted of criminal acts.

We believe that offenders must be held accountable for criminal actions, particularly those that result in a loss of life or livelihood, so we support measures that prevent, deter, or eliminate crimes, and set apart dangerous offenders. While insisting on accountability, we are also committed to fair and proportional sentencing and to the humane treatment of those who are imprisoned. We strongly support programs in prisons designed to promote rehabilitation and restoration of inmates. We do not believe that prisons should be for-profit enterprises.

In our communities, we support measures designed to address the root causes of crime, including poverty and the lack of educational opportunities, recreational activities, substance abuse

treatment and counseling, mental health services, and job training. We endorse initiatives designed to promote positive interactions between law enforcement and members of local communities. Further, we encourage efforts to reintegrate people who have been released from prison back into the community, including the provision of employment opportunities, the restoration of voting rights, and, where appropriate, the sealing of criminal records.

We encourage churches to be in ministry with those who are incarcerated, advocating for these people and for criminal justice reform as well. As forgiven people, Christians must combat the stigma often attached to people who have been in prison. We applaud the involvement of many United Methodists in prison ministries centering on worship, education, and rehabilitation.

F. War and Military Service—The church deplores war and all other forms of violent conflict and urges the peaceful settlement of all disputes. We yearn for the day when there will be no more war and people will live together in peace and justice.

We reject the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy and insist that every peaceful and diplomatic means of resolution be exhausted before the start of armed conflicts. Similarly, we oppose the increasing reliance on preemptive strikes unless they can be clearly demonstrated to be proportionate in response, delimited in human casualties, and undertaken in response to clear and immediate threats to human lives. We grieve that in a world where so many live in poverty, governments continue to dedicate enormous resources to preparing for and conducting wars. We are especially distressed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and call not only for an end to their production, but for their complete elimination.

Christians have struggled with the issue of war since the time of Jesus. Some Christians have argued historically that war and other acts of violence are never acceptable, while other believers have asserted that it is sometimes necessary to take up arms in self-defense or to defend the innocent and prevent unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide.

We urge all United Methodists to examine their own consciences and earnestly seek God's guidance when it comes to matters of military service. We honor and offer support to those who choose military service as a result of personal conviction and urge that they perform their duties in harmony with the tenets of the Christian faith and in accordance with the laws of the Geneva Conventions.

We also honor and support the witness of pacifists whose consciences and religious convictions prevent them from serving in the military or limit them to taking noncombatant roles. The roots of such pacifist convictions are well established in the historic stances of The United Methodist Church and its predecessor bodies. We oppose compulsory military service and urge governments to abolish this practice and, instead, allow those who choose not to serve in the military to complete terms of community service or to contribute in other creative ways.

As a church, we commit ourselves to support all people as they discern how best to model the nonviolent example of Jesus. The church supports and guides those who serve in the military; those who are conscientious objectors; veterans living with physical, psychological, spiritual, and moral injury; and families of people affected by military service. We urge the church to care and work for systemic justice for all people affected by war, and to advocate for peacemaking and nonviolent conflict transformation in global and local conflicts.

BASIC RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

We declare that all individuals, no matter their circumstances or social standing, are entitled to basic human rights and freedoms. These rights are grounded in God's gracious act in creation (Genesis 1:27), and they are revealed fully in Jesus' incarnation of divine love. As a church, we will work to protect these rights and freedoms within the church and to reform the structures of society to ensure that every human being can thrive.

As set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other important international treaties, basic rights and freedoms include the right to life, liberty, and security as well as to equal treatment before the law and freedom from unlawful detention. Additional liberties include the rights to fair trial, privacy, public assembly, free expression, democracy, food, and shelter. Further, workers have rights to engage in collective bargaining, receive just compensation, and work in safe, healthy environments.

Rights call forth responsibilities. We urge individuals, congregations, and other church bodies to advocate vigorously not only for their own rights, but also for the rights of those who are voiceless or whose voices are unheard in society. Governments must be held responsible for guaranteeing human rights and liberties; such responsibilities include ensuring that all people have access to

affordable, high-quality education, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, or any other divisive marker.

We condemn all attempts to deny individuals their basic rights or freedoms or to strip human beings of their inherent dignity and worth. We, therefore, reject within the church and wider society any act of discrimination, hatred, or violence directed against individuals or groups based on national origin, tribal affiliation, ethnicity, age, gender identity, disability status, economic condition, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or any other factors. Additionally, in the face of historic wrongs perpetrated against indigenous peoples, enslaved African peoples, and other marginalized groups, we call for forthright confession and repentance as well as concrete acts of reparation to redress past and present forms of social injustice.

A. Health Care—We affirm health care as a basic human right and vow to work toward expanded access to all forms of medical treatment, including preventative, therapeutic, and palliative care. Half the world's population lack access to health care, and a growing number of people who do have access face increased medical expenses for themselves or their loved ones, pushing them toward poverty. To confront these painful realities, we urge United Methodists to join efforts aimed at creating systems that provide comprehensive health protections for all. Additionally, we believe that everyone has a right to decent living conditions, including adequate food and water, safe housing, and a healthy environment.

Health care as a human right also means that clinics, hospitals, and medical services and treatments must be accessible, affordable, and of good quality. They must also be available when and where they are needed and be provided on an equitable basis. We call on governments, businesses, churches, and civil society institutions to work cooperatively to ensure that every human being has access to medical services and treatment.

Additionally, we call on national governments and international health organizations and medical groups to work cooperatively and expeditiously to address global pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, as well as outbreaks of contagious diseases that threaten the health and well-being of entire countries and regions. As a church, we support other measures and initiatives to improve human health, including investments in preventative care, good nutrition, continuing research in infectious disease prevention and treatment, pre- and postnatal health, and substance abuse treatment on demand. We

commend churches that are involved in community-based health-care ministries.

B. Children and Young People—We call on church and society to support and advocate for the well-being of all children and young people and for their safety, nurture, agency, education, and participation in church and community life. We condemn destructive practices of neglect, abuse, abduction, exploitation, human trafficking, use of children in armed conflict, and imprisonment. We recognize that perpetrators of abuse or endangerment are usually in positions of power. We hold them accountable for their actions, whether they are parents and family, teachers, clergy, or congregational or public leaders.

We call on the church to stand firmly against the detention of children, and we challenge policies that deny basic rights to the young or discriminate against them based on gender identity, ethnicity, abilities, economic status, sexual orientation, migratory status, religion, or national origin. Further, we urge people in positions of authority and power to support and include young people in making decisions and contributing their gifts at all levels of church and society.

C. Elders and the Aging—Elders have many gifts to give. We call upon the church, governments, and civic bodies to provide continuing opportunities for them to participate in the human family and contribute to God's work in the world. Elders also have the right to support and protection against the vulnerabilities of aging, expressed in economic disparities, unjust inheritance practices, inadequate public health care, and systemic neglect based on gender, ethnicity, abilities, and economic conditions.

We urge the church, governments, and civil society to develop and enact social policies and programs that provide for the needs and rights of people as they age. We support social policies that integrate elders into community life and guarantee resources for their well-being, including nondiscriminatory employment opportunities, educational and service opportunities, accessible medical care and housing, protection from economic or psychological exploitation, and high-quality, publicly assisted elder care. We affirm the self-determination of elders whether living independently or in families or institutions, and we condemn violations of their quality of life through unnecessary medication or restrictions on their social participation and agency.

D. Women and Girls—We affirm that the gifts of women and girls are vital to God's creation and make important contributions to both church and society. We support equal opportunities and rights for all women and girls, regardless of national origin, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, or other characteristics.

To ensure these rights, we implore the church, governments, and civic institutions to develop more equitable structures and policies and to recognize women's value, wisdom, and concerns. All women have a right to equal educational opportunities, protection of their bodies, reproductive justice, parental rights and responsibilities, employment, and equitable compensation and promotion.

We affirm the dignity and worth of all women and girls and we urge the church, governments, and civic bodies to nurture their leadership potential and enhance their opportunities to provide leadership in all aspects of church and social life. We ask the same bodies to ensure their rights to live free from gendered expectations that limit their full development as human beings and from harassment, discrimination, violence, domestic or workplace abuse, human trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in all times and places. In the strongest sense possible, we urge the church and all political and civic bodies to enact policies that promote and protect the status and role of women and girls in all facets of life so they can thrive and contribute their gifts to the well-being of society.

E. Men and Boys—We affirm that men and boys make important contributions to both church and society. We support equal opportunities for all men and boys regardless of national origin, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, or other characteristics.

To ensure these rights, opportunities, and protections, we urge the church, governments, and civic institutions to develop equitable structures and policies to make certain that the dignity and worth of all men and boys are recognized and affirmed. We further call for the rights of men and boys to be safeguarded in education, employment, compensation and promotion, and parental rights and responsibilities.

We affirm the rights of men and boys to live free from harassment, violence, discrimination, domestic or workplace abuse, human trafficking, and gendered expectations that limit their full development as human beings. We encourage the creation of opportunities for their leadership potential to be nurtured, in order

that they might thrive and contribute their gifts to the well-being of society.

F. Indigenous, Native, and Aboriginal Communities—We support the rights of indigenous, native, and aboriginal communities and affirm that like all people they must be afforded the basic rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We condemn acts of genocide against indigenous peoples and call for government treaties and contracts with native and aboriginal peoples to be honored and enforced.

We join with indigenous peoples and tribes to demand that their rights to exercise national sovereignty be upheld by governments and courts. We support the efforts of indigenous people to revitalize their languages and cultures in the face of concerted efforts to assimilate them into mainstream societies. We acknowledge that indigenous, native, and aboriginal peoples are entitled to control their land, water. and other resources, and we decry any attempts to forcibly seize these resources or to forcibly remove indigenous people from their territories.

G. Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees—We affirm the dignity, worth, and rights of migrants, immigrants, and refugees, including displaced and stateless people. In so doing, we acknowledge that the world today is facing an unprecedented crisis related to the displacement of vast numbers of people due to such factors as ongoing wars and other hostilities, foreign interventions, widespread famine and hunger, global warming and climate change, and the failure of nation-states to adequately protect and care for their people.

We recognize that displaced people are particularly vulnerable as their in-between status often provides them with few protections and benefits, leaving them open to exploitation, violence, and abuse. We urge United Methodists to welcome migrants, refugees, and immigrants into their congregations and to commit themselves to providing concrete support, including help with navigating restrictive and often lengthy immigration policies, and assistance with securing food, housing, education, employment, and other kinds of support.

We oppose all laws and policies that attempt to criminalize, dehumanize, or punish displaced individuals and families based on their status as migrants, immigrants, or refugees. Additionally, we decry attempts to detain displaced people and hold them in inhumane and unsanitary conditions. We challenge policies that call for the separation of families, especially parents and minor children,

and we oppose the existence of for-profit detention centers for such purposes.

H. People with Disabilities—We affirm the full humanity and acknowledge the gifts of people living with disabilities. We call for the elimination of all barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in the life of local congregations and the broader society. Though no one term has gained universal acceptance throughout our global connection, "people with disabilities" refers to a broad group of people living with distinctive cognitive, physical, developmental, sensory, neurological, intellectual, and psychological conditions or challenges.

We lament that the church has often stigmatized and discriminated against people with disabilities by imposing labels with negative connotations, by failing to make space in church life for the full range of God's people, and by interpreting words such as "blind," "lame," and "deaf" in pejorative ways. Because of this, people with disabilities are frequently dismissed or undervalued, both in the church and in civil society. In response, we call the church to acts of repentance, to earnest listening, and to a collaborative ministry with people with disabilities so they can contribute their wisdom and gifts to the mission and ministry of local congregations and other church bodies.

We likewise call on civil society, business, and government leaders to work toward the removal of all barriers and to provide opportunities for those with disabilities to make their unique contributions to the entire society. We call for the protection of the rights of all people with disabilities, including the rights to health care, employment, education, housing and transportation, and to freedom from discrimination.

I. Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities—Because all people are of sacred worth and certain basic human rights are due to everyone, we are committed to supporting the equal rights, liberties, and protections of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We see clear issues of equality and justice in protecting the rightful claims of those with shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, because in many countries sexual and gender minorities are disproportionately impacted by social stigmas, discrimination, coercion and violence, we call on churches,

governments, businesses, and civic organizations to do all in their power to combat such unjust treatment and to promote equal rights and protections for all.

J. Religious Minorities—We affirm the rights of religious minorities to worship in peace and to exercise their faith free from fear of discrimination or persecution. We condemn actions by any individual, group, or organization that denigrate or demean those belonging to another faith. As Christians, we consider such attitudes and actions to be antithetical to Jesus' command to love one's neighbor.

We urge governments, businesses, churches, and other institutions in civil society to take concerted action to preserve and protect the rights of all religious people. We object to any form of discrimination and intolerance toward religious minorities, including laws that ban religious clothing and symbols, and statements from public officials that incite intolerance, hatred, and violence. We call for responsible media coverage of religions and condemn the dissemination of stereotypes and untruths about religious minorities.

We endorse the rights of all religious people to practice their faith, free from unjustified and unnecessary legal, political, and financial restraints. We also support the right of individuals to choose their own faith, and we reject attempts to impose beliefs on people or to coerce or manipulate them into joining or remaining a part of a religious tradition when they have decided to disaffiliate. Individual religious belief must not be used to deny basic human rights.

¶ 164. V. OUR SOCIAL CREED

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection

of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress. We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

(It is recommended that this statement of Social Principles be continually available to United Methodist Christians and that it be emphasized regularly in every congregation. It is further recommended that "Our Social Creed" be frequently used in Sunday worship.)

A COMPANION LITANY TO OUR SOCIAL CREED

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,
demands justice for workers in the marketplace.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world's warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.

Teaching the Social Principles

INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

The Social Principles are not church law but rather "represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions" (*Book of Discipline*, p. 106). The Social Principles were first approved at the 1972 General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, and have been a part of the *Book of Discipline*, the church's governing document.

General Conference is the denomination's highest legislative body. It meets every four years and is the only entity authorized to speak officially on behalf of The United Methodist Church. General Conference considers petitions proposed by individuals, groups, or agencies within The United Methodist Church. These petitions are submitted in advance of General Conference and, if supported, amend the language in the *Book of Discipline*. Delegates to General Conference are elected by each annual (or other regional) conference, with an equal number of clergy and lay representatives, based on the number of United Methodists in the region. There are over 9 million United Methodists across the globe.

At the 2020/2024 General Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, delegates were represented as follows: 63% were from the U.S., 26% from Africa, 4% from Europe, and 7% from the Philippines.

Together, the General Conference overwhelmingly adopted a revised set of Social Principles. This revision marked the first full update since the original Social Principles were approved at the 1972 General Conference. The 2020/2024 Social Principles were developed through intentional dialogues across the worldwide United Methodist connection with three primary goals in mind:

- To integrate biblical and Wesleyan references throughout the text.
- To reflect the worldwide nature of the church in all areas of the document.
- To ensure it is written concisely and clearly.

For more information on the revision process of the 2020/2024 Social Principles, visit: https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-as-adopted-by-general-conference-charlotte-2024.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

This guide provides a six-week lesson plan designed to help your group study and become familiar with the Social Principles. Each session is intended to last one hour but can be adjusted to fit the available time.

The first lesson focuses on the Preface, Preamble, and an overview of the topics covered in the Social Principles. Sessions two through four delve deeper into each segment of the Social Principles. The last session connects the Social Principles to the *Book of Resolutions*.

Each session follows the framework of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral—Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. Sessions begin with a "Biblical/Theological Foundation," followed by a "Deeper Look," where the group explores each segment through questions connected to tradition, reason, and experience.

The Social Principles are only as powerful as United Methodists actively living out these prophetic statements. So, each session includes a time for Application, allowing the group to reflect on the church's ministries and discuss how to apply the session's themes to strengthen and advance current ministries.

To make the most of the "Deeper Look" questions, participants are encouraged to prepare by doing extra research and reading the week before. Below is a list of resources to help guide the conversation:

Additional Resources:

- "A Brief History of The United Methodist Church" *2020/2024 Book of Discipline* (p. 11)
- "1908SocialCreed"video,https://www.umc.org/en/content/methodist-history-1908-social-creed-for-workers

- "In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace" by the Council of Bishops (1986)
- *For Justice and Enduring Peace: 100 Years of Social Witness*, Jessica M. Smith with epilogue by Susan T. Henry-Crowe
- Faith and Facts Cards, www.umcjustice.org
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- John Wesley's sermons, commentary on the New Testament, https://www.resourceumc.org/en/topics/history
- ResourceUMC.org

Facilitation Tips

As a facilitator, creating space for meaningful dialogue involves fostering an environment of open communication, mutual respect, and inclusivity. Here are some tips to help you guide the process:

- **Ensure the environment is comfortable and accessible.** Be mindful of participants' accessibility needs and create a space that accommodates everyone.
- **Allow time for reflection.** At the end of each session, offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.
- **Don't fear silence.** People process their thoughts in different ways, and silence can provide valuable time for reflection.
- **Establish communication guidelines** to help maintain respect and productive conversations. Dedicate time during the first session to establish these guidelines with the group's consensus and remind everyone of them at the beginning of each session.

Possible Communication Guideline Ideas:

- Use "I" statements.
- Avoid judgment or assumptions.
- Reflect on what others are saying before responding.
- Respect diversity. Acknowledge and celebrate the different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of all group members.
- Recognize and validate the emotions present in the room, whether participants are frustrated, excited, or uncertain.
- Be open to being transformed by someone else's perspective.

- Encourage equal participation. Invite those who haven't shared to speak, and those who have to give space for others.

SESSION ONE: THE PREAMBLE & OVERVIEW

Welcome (15 minutes)

Open with prayer.

Introduction: Since this is the first time gathering, take time for each person to introduce themselves.

Possible introduction questions:

- What influences the way you form your opinion on a particular issue?
- How did you first learn about the Social Principles?
- Is there a social justice topic you are concerned about most?
- What drew you to this class and what do you hope to learn?

Create Communication Guidelines: Spend a few minutes creating Communication Guidelines for the group. You can use the examples listed in Facilitation Tips as a starting point. Be sure to keep a copy of the agreed-upon guidelines for future meetings.

The Preface & Preamble (15 minutes)

Start by reading the *Preface* of the Social Principles aloud, taking turns with participants reading one paragraph at a time.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean that the Social Principles "are not church law. Instead they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions"?
- How is the Social Principles a "living document"? What are the implications for the church to receive it as such?

Read the *Preamble* of the Social Principles aloud, taking turns with participants reading one paragraph at a time.

- In Genesis 2:7-15, God establishes a covenantal relationship with all of creation, while in John 13:34-35, Jesus calls his disciples to love one another as a reflection of God's love for them. How do these passages help us understand our role in being good stewards of all God created? How does the idea of fulfilling "distinctive roles in the covenantal relationship with God" apply to both our relationship with creation and with one another?
- In Matthew 25:45, Jesus highlights that neglecting the needs of "the least of these" is akin to neglecting him. Who do you think are the "least of these" in your community? Considering the statement about our participation in unjust and life-destroying social systems, how does God's extravagant love and grace to all free us to face our participation? How does the Holy Spirit's guidance alongside God's forgiving love free us to embrace what the Preamble calls "wholehearted discipleship"? What might wholehearted discipleship look like in your life? In the life of your church and community?
- The Preamble affirms that each of us is created in the image of God and the dignity of all beings. Yet we are all each of us and collectively distinct including in faith expressions, ministry gifts, and life experiences shaped by ethnicity, culture, ability, age, sexual orientation, and gender. How can the church cultivate an environment where these differences are not only respected but also celebrated as a reflection of God's diverse creation? What are the practical and spiritual challenges the church faces in living out this affirmation, and how can we respond to them in ways that deepen our collective faith and ministry?
- In Micah 6:8, God calls us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. John Wesley's General Rules—to do no harm, do good, and attend to the ordinances of God—also emphasize living out justice, mercy, and faithful obedience. How do these two statements align in calling us to embody justice and mercy in our daily lives? In what ways can we actively live out both Micah's vision and Wesley's rules in practical ways within our communities, especially when it comes to addressing injustice and showing mercy to others?

Concentric Circle Exercise (25 minutes)

Ask participants to form a circle around the room. Then, have every other person step inside the circle, creating two concentric circles. The inner circle should face outward so that everyone is paired with a partner (double up if there are an uneven number of participants). Keep time with a phone or watch.

Explain:

"I will read a statement related to the Social Principles. The first partner will have 45 seconds to share their thoughts while the second listens without interrupting. After 45 seconds, I will let you know it's time to switch roles—then the second partner will have 45 seconds to speak while the first listens in silence. After each round, the outer circle will rotate to the right, so everyone will get a new partner. We'll repeat this process until all statements are discussed.

"Say hello to your partner. Here's the first statement. The outer circle will speak first: Climate change is a myth. Outer circle, you may start."

Outer circle speaks (45 seconds)

Inside circle speaks (45 seconds)

"Here's what the Social Principles say about climate change: 'Global warming and climate change are already creating extreme conditions that threaten the entirety of life on earth. Over-industrialization, widespread deforestation, and overreliance on fossil fuels are but some of the human activities that have contributed to the buildup of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere." ¶ 160 Creation in Peril B

"Thank your partner, and now, outer circle, move to your right and greet your new partner!"

Continue the same process with other discussion statements related to the Social Principles. Examples are listed below.

Debrief:

After completing all the rounds, gather everyone into one large circle or invite participants back to their seats. Then ask the following questions.

- What was it like to listen without responding? Was it difficult?
- Were some questions difficult to talk about?
- What did you learn about your partners during this exercise?

Suggested Statements for the Concentric Circle Exercise:

1. Climate change is a myth.

Social Principles: "Global warming and climate change are already creating extreme conditions that threaten the entirety of life on earth. Over-industrialization, widespread deforestation, and overreliance on fossil fuels are but some of the human activities that have contributed to the buildup of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere." ¶ 160 Creation in Peril B

2. There will always be the rich and the poor, and we should accept this.

Social Principles: "We commit ourselves to be in active ministry with impoverished communities by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and by supporting their efforts to secure equal opportunities and meet human needs, including food, water, health care, and education." ¶ 161 Economic Challenges B

3. Hazing and bullying is a part of life. People need to work it out between themselves.

Social Principles: "We decry all forms of bullying, which consists of unwanted and aggressive behaviors toward children, youth, and adults, including verbal taunts, physical violence, emotional manipulation, and social intimidation." ¶ 162 Other Social Issues B

4. There has to be a better way of resolving geo-political conflicts without the use of war.

Social Principles: "We reject the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy and insist that every peaceful and diplomatic means of resolution be exhausted before the start of armed conflicts." ¶ 163 Government Responsibilities F

5. Marriage is between two people, a man and a woman.

Social Principles: "Within the church, we affirm marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith, an adult man and woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age, into union with one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community." ¶ 162 The Nurturing Community D

6. The environment impacts everyone equally.

Social Principles: "We confess that the negative impacts resulting from the degradation of the natural world have fallen disproportionately on

marginalized communities, including indigenous tribes, religious and ethnic communities, people living in poverty, and other vulnerable groups."
¶ 160 Stewardship of Creation A

7. Wealth disparities between richer and poorer nations is a spiritual matter.

Social Principles: "As a church, we recognize the importance of creating just, equitable, and sustainable economies that benefit all members of society, especially marginalized and vulnerable peoples. Further, because globalization transcends the capacity of any single individual, community, or government to manage, we call on international bodies, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and others, to hold multinational corporations and national governments accountable to provide for economies that promote people over profits and protect the environment." ¶ 161 Economic Challenges A

8. Migrant workers have basic human rights and deserve to be treated with dignity.

Social Principles: "We affirm the dignity, worth, and rights of migrants, immigrants, and refugees, including displaced and stateless people. In so doing, we acknowledge that the world today is facing an unprecedented crisis related to the displacement of vast numbers of people due to such factors as ongoing wars and other hostilities, foreign interventions, widespread famine and hunger, global warming and climate change, and the failure of nation-states to adequately protect and care for their people." ¶ 163 Basic Rights and Freedoms G

9. Capital punishment is a necessary deterrent.

Social Principles: "Our commitment to the inherent dignity and worth of every person and our historic stance as United Methodists compels us to oppose capital punishment and the imposition of the death penalty." ¶ 163 Government Responsibilities D

10. Racism, like sexism, is part of the human condition.

Social Principles: "We condemn racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, and any ideology or social practice based on false and misleading beliefs or ideologies that one group of human beings is superior to all other groups of human beings." ¶ 162 Other Social Issues L

Closing (5 minutes)

Allow time for reflection. Offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.

Remind the group to read ¶ 160 "Community of All Creation" for the next session.

Ask participants to prepare for the next session by reviewing and reading the additional resources listed above.

Close with "Our Social Creed" or "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." ¶ 164

SESSION TWO: COMMUNITY OF ALL CREATION

Welcome (5 minutes)

Opening Prayer

Review of the Communications Guidelines from the first session

Biblical/Theological Foundations (15 minutes)

Read the *Preface* of the Community of All Creation aloud, taking turns with participants reading one paragraph at a time.

- In *Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, Sermon 23, John Wesley says we should see God in all things and view nothing as separate from God. How does this shape our understanding of Christian stewardship of creation?
- How does Scripture inform a Christian approach to sustainability? How does it help us discern our responsibility toward caring for creation in a way that honors God and future generations?

Deeper Look (20 minutes)

Break into small groups (3-4 people). Assign half the groups to discuss "Creation in Peril" and the other half to discuss "Stewardship of Creation." Answer the following questions.

- What has the church historically said or done about these issues? How has it evolved?

- What do current theories and research say about these issues? How do these theories and research guide us in how the church should respond?
- How do these issues impact people in the church, local community, and the broader community? How can the voices of those with lived experience be central to how we respond as a church? How do these global challenges connect to your daily life?

Invite each group to share key points or insights that stood out to them from their discussion.

Application (15 minutes)

Encourage participants to think about how they can actively live out these Social Principles in their community, church, or personal life.

Consider looking at ministries in your church that are connected to addressing issues covered in ¶ 160. Discuss ways to grow the ministry, if you have one at your church, or start a green ministry initiative! Consider becoming a Green Church! Visit www.umcreationjustice.org for more information.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/environmental-justice to learn more about current legislation connected to Environmental Justice and how United Methodists can engage in advocating for God's people and God's planet.

Connect with your annual conference's Church and Society Chair and the Caretakers of God's Creation Annual Conference Coordinators to learn about initiatives in your annual conference.

Closing (5 minutes)

Allow time for reflection. Offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.

Remind the group to read ¶ 161 "The Economic Community" for the next session.

Ask participants to prepare for the next session by reviewing and reading the additional resources listed above.

Close with "Our Social Creed" or "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." ¶ 164

SESSION THREE: THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

Welcome (5 minutes)

Opening Prayer
Review of the Communications Guidelines from the first session

Biblical/Theological Foundations (15 minutes)

Read the *Preface* of The Economic Community aloud taking turns with participants reading one paragraph at a time.

- How does John Wesley's idea that we are stewards, not proprietors, of wealth challenge modern perspectives on economic justice? In what ways should this stewardship influence policies or personal financial decisions to promote fairness and equity in society?
- How do the calls for justice in Amos 5:7-13, Matthew 25:31-46, and James 2:15-16 challenge people of faith to be responsible stewards of wealth and resources? In what ways can individuals and faith communities work toward creating equitable and sustainable economies that reflect God's vision of justice?

Deeper Look (20 minutes)

Break into small groups (3-4 people). Assign half of the groups to discuss "Economic Challenges" and the other half to discuss "Economic Justice." Answer the following questions:

- What has the church historically said or done about these issues? How has it evolved?
- What do current theories and research say about these issues? How do these theories and research guide us in how the church should respond?
- How do these issues impact people in the church, local community, and the broader community? How can the voices of those with lived experience be central to how we respond as a church? How do these global challenges connect to your daily life?

Invite each group to share key points or insights that stood out to them from their discussion.

Application (15 minutes)

Encourage the participants to think about how they can actively live out the Social Principles of "The Economic Community" in their community, church, or personal life.

Consider exploring ministries in your church that address issues covered in ¶ 161. If the ministry is mercy/charity-oriented, consider how to advocate for economic justice.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/economic-justice to learn about current legislation connected to Economic Justice and how United Methodists can engage in advocating for abundant living for all of God's children.

Connect with your annual conference's Church and Society Chair to learn about initiatives in your annual conference.

Closing (5 minutes)

Allow time for reflection. Offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.

Remind the group to read ¶ 162 "The Social Community" for the next session.

Ask participants to prepare for the next session by reviewing and reading the additional resources listed above.

Close with "Our Social Creed" or "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." ¶ 164

SESSION FOUR: THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY

Welcome (5 minutes)

Opening Prayer
Review of the Communications Guidelines from the first session

Biblical/Theological Foundations (15 minutes)

Read the *Preface* of The Social Community aloud, taking turns with participants reading one paragraph at a time.

- John Wesley stated, *"The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness."* How does this idea challenge the church today in its mission to heal a broken

world? How might Wesley's emphasis on social holiness shape our response to issues in the midst of a broken world?

- In Philippians 2:3-8, Paul calls believers to exhibit humility, considering others more significant than themselves and modeling the self-sacrificial love of Christ. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul emphasizes the unity and interdependence of the body of Christ, where each member has a unique and essential role. How can these teachings guide the church's response to heal a broken world? In what ways can the church live out this humility and unity to address issues like division, injustice, and suffering, ensuring all individuals are valued and supported within the community?

Deeper Look (20 minutes)

Break into small groups (3-4 people).

- Assign one-third of the groups to discuss **"The Nurturing Community."**
- Assign another third to discuss **"Other Social Issues" letters A-D.**
- Assign the remaining third to discuss **"Other Social Issues" letters E-M.**

Answer the following questions:

- What has the church historically said or done about these issues? How has it evolved?
- What do current theories and research say about these issues? How do these theories and research guide us in how the church should respond?
- How do these issues impact people in the church, local community, and the broader community? How can the voices of those with lived experience be central to how we respond as a church? How do these global challenges connect to your daily life?

Invite each group to share key points or insights that stood out them from their discussion.

Application (15 minutes)

Encourage participants to think about how they can actively live out the Social Principles of "The Social Community" in their community, church, or personal life.

Consider exploring ministries in your church that address issues covered in ¶ 162. If the ministry is mercy/charity-oriented, consider how to advocate for the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of our communities.

Visit www.umcjustice.org to learn about current legislation connected to issues in "The Social Community."

Connect with your annual conference's Church and Society Chair to learn about initiatives in your annual conference.

Closing (5 minutes)

Allow time for reflection. Offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.

Remind the group to read ¶ 163 "The Political Community" for the next session.

Ask participants to prepare for the next session by reviewing and reading the additional resources listed above.

Close with "Our Social Creed" or "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." ¶ 164

SESSION FIVE: THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY

Welcome (5 minutes)

Opening Prayer
Review of the Communications Guidelines from the first session

Biblical/Theological Foundations (15 minutes)

Read the *Preface* of The Political Community aloud, taking turns with participants reading one paragraph at a time.

- In John Wesley's "The Circumcision of the Heart," he emphasizes that "'if there be any virtue, if there be any praise,' they are all comprised in this one word,—love." How does Wesley's view of love as central to virtue and praise challenge us to consider our responsibility in political action? How can this understanding of love guide our engagement in societal

issues for the betterment of all, especially when considering the need for social justice and equality?

- As a worldwide church, how can The United Methodist Church deepen its engagement with the United Nations to support and advocate for human rights for all people? What are some examples of how personal actions and a nation's actions can affect people in other parts of the world?

Deeper Look (20 minutes)

Break into small groups (3-4 people). Assign half of the groups to discuss "Government Responsibilities" and the other half to discuss "Basic Rights and Freedoms." Answer the following questions:

- What has the church historically said or done about these issues? How has it evolved?
- What do current theories and research say about these issues? How do these theories and research guide us in how the church should respond?
- How do these issues impact people in the church, local community, and the broader community? How can the voices of those with lived experience be central to how we respond as a church? How do these global challenges connect to your daily life?

Invite each group to share key points or insights that stood out to them from their discussion.

Application (15 minutes)

Encourage the participants to think about how they can embody the Social Principles of "The Political Community" in their community, church, or personal life.

Consider exploring ministries in your church that address issues covered in ¶ 163. If the ministry is mercy/charity-oriented, consider how to advocate for peace and human rights.

Visit www.umcjustice.org to explore current legislation related to "The Political Community" and learn how United Methodists are advocating for the betterment of society and the promotion of the common good.

Connect with your annual conference's Church and Society Chair and the Peace with Justice Coordinators to learn about initiatives in your annual conference.

Additionally, learn about the United Nations and International Affairs Ministry at the General Board of Church and Society (www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/united-nations-ministry).

Closing (10 minutes)

Allow time for reflection. Offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.

Print the "Index of Topics" for each participant (www.umcjustice.org/documents/567). As a group, select one Resolution related to each section of the Social Principles.

Example: Social Principles: Creation in Peril, *Book of Resolutions* #1110, "Climate Change and the Church's Response." Encourage everyone to read the chosen resolution for the next session.

Ask participants to prepare for the next session, by reviewing and reading the chosen resolutions and additional resources listed above.

Close with "Our Social Creed" or "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." ¶ 164

SESSION SIX: THE *BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*

Welcome (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer

Review of the Communications Guidelines from the first session

Introduction to the *Book of Resolutions*

Explain:

The 1968 General Conference decided because of the length of the *Book of Discipline*, the resolutions would be published separately in the *Book of Resolutions*. The Social Principles can be found in both the *Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions*.

Similar to the Social Principles, resolutions are approved by General Conference, and they offer the "official expressions of The United Methodist Church for eight years following their adoption, after which time they shall be deemed to have expired unless re-adopted" (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 511.2a).

The resolutions are organized similarly to the Social Principles: (I) Community of All Creation, (II) Economic Community, (III) Social

Community, (IV) Political Community, and (X) Other Resolutions. The first four sections match the sections of the Social Principles.

While the Social Principles address global social concerns and reflect the diverse contexts of the worldwide church, the *Book of Resolutions* contains specific policy statements tailored to particular locations and contexts.

Deeper Look (25 minutes)

Break into small groups (3-4 people) by the resolutions chosen in the previous session. Discuss the following questions:

- How is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Experience, Reason) reflected in the resolution?
- What are the similarities and differences between the Social Principles and the resolution?
- How is the resolution contextualized, and what are the global implications of the issues it addresses?

Invite each group to share key points or insights that stood out to them from their discussion.

Application (15 minutes)

Each resolution has a call to action for the church. How can your church participate and be an advocate of these issues? To the group's best ability, create a one-month plan, a three-month plan, a six-month plan, etc.

Visit www.umcjustice.org to learn how Church and Society is implementing the Social Principles and other policy statements of General Conference on Christian social concerns.

Connect with your annual conference's Church and Society Chair and the Peace with Justice Coordinators to learn about initiatives in your annual conference.

Closing (10 minutes)

Allow time for reflection. Offer participants space to reflect on what was discussed. This could include a moment of silence, journaling, or sharing thoughts in pairs or small groups.

Close with "Our Social Creed" or "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." ¶ 164

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Most of the teaching suggestions offered here can work with any of the Social Principles. The key is to find several different approaches that work well with your group members and to mix the methods so that persons with different learning styles have a greater chance to learn and engage with the Social Principles.

A. Put a section under a "microscope." Ask your group members to work through one section sentence by sentence. Write down the topic of the sentence. Determine what the section is in favor of and what it is against. See if you can find a statement supporting a particular position. Does the social principle give an explicit reason for its conclusion? Does that reason appeal to particular United Methodist beliefs or practices? If so, what are they?

B. Consider listening to lived experts and their experiences. Hearing lived experiences is important to better understand issues and how certain policies and systemic problems impact real lives. Consider reaching out to your local nonprofit organization to see if they have a speaker's bureau of lived experts and invite them to share their testimony. (The National Coalition for the Homeless www.nationalhomeless.org has a "Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau" that can speak in your church.)

C. Write a petition to the 2028 General Conference. If most or all the members of your class would like to see a portion of the Social Principles changed, help them research how to prepare a petition to send to General Conference. Encourage them to submit their petition. At the next General Conference, your participants can track their petitions through your conference's delegates. If not everyone agrees on changing a single social principle, encourage the group to form petition interest groups. In so doing, participants will have to research a specific social issue thoroughly enough to be able to take an informed position on it, learn the process to submit a petition to General Conference, and take a firm stand on an issue, backing it up with action, all of which is excellent advocacy training.

D. Read current newspapers and social media posts. Bring a week's worth of news stories, both local and global. Ask group members to gather news from a variety of sources and to compare how they each tell the same story. How

does the author or publication's social location affect their retelling of the story? How should this shape our consumption of information?

E. Audit your local church. Assign portions of the Social Principles to individuals or small groups to investigate how seriously your church takes this principle. How do we live faithfully in the tension between theory and practice? If group members can suggest specific policy changes, encourage them to present their ideas to the church council, the board of trustees, or the appropriate decision-making body.

F. Bring an issue into your own backyard. An issue becomes more urgent when it affects the people near and dear to us. When we can put a face, story, and name to an issue, the social principle becomes a matter of utmost importance. Assign individual social principles to groups of two to four persons. Ask them to localize the issue spoken about in their section.

G. Explore an unfamiliar topic. Some social justice issues might be new or seem irrelevant to members of your group. Assign such topics to group members to research and report to the group the following week. Go in-depth: invite guest presenters; take a field trip; immerse yourself in another cultural context.

H. Give your group a chance to teach and mentor others. One of the most effective ways to understand a topic is to prepare to teach it to someone else. Have your group teach (or prepare lessons for someone else to teach) the Social Principles to another group, such as such as a class of youth, the church trustees, or the missions committee. Remind your group members that they need to tailor their teaching to the needs of the learners.

I. Educate, advocate, and organize. Focus on a social principle the group is passionate about. Research the social principle and advocate for it through letter-writing campaigns, emails, phone calls, and face-to-face visits with your local, state, and national legislators. Network with other local churches, your conference Board of Church and Society, and like-minded community members to stand up for justice and peace. Consider attending a United Methodist Seminar Program at the General Board of Church and Society.

RESOURCES

Unless otherwise noted, all resources are available at www.cokesbury.com.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. Updated and published by The United Methodist Publishing House following each General Conference. Pay particular attention to the sections on local church ministry and General Board of Church and Society. The Social Principles are Part V, ¶¶ 160–164.

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church. Updated and published by The United Methodist Publishing House after each General Conference. Includes social-concerns statements for consideration and action by all United Methodists.

Faith and Facts Cards. Four-color, worship-bulletin-size cards that address a variety of subjects. Topics include health care, domestic violence, criminal justice reform, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, death penalty, climate justice, living wage, alcohol and other drugs, gambling, hunger and poverty, and U.S. immigration. Available at www.umcjustice.org.

Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation: Church & Society. A 32-page booklet that provides a practical biblical and theological basis for social justice ministry. Covers the role of boards of church and society in local churches and conferences, cultivating the spiritual disciplines of social justice action, reflection, and leadership development through relationships of advocacy and organizing.

Mission and Ministry Cards. Four-color cards with questions to guide personal study or facilitate small group discussions within your church. Focus on linking social principles issues to your local church and community, while keeping the broader global context in mind. Explore ways to move from discussion to advocacy, moving faith into action. The studies are organized by each Social Principle category: The

Preface and Preamble, The Community of All Creation, The Economic Community, The Social Community, The Political Community. Available at www.umcjustice.org.

United Methodist Communications website (umcom.org). Downloadable media and print resources to support United Methodist Special Sundays that pertain to the Social Principles: Human Relations Day and Peace with Justice Sunday.

United Methodist Seminars and Webinars on National and International Affairs.

National Seminars are educational, interactive, faith-forming, thought-provoking, and fun. Seminars are tailor-made for each group, which selects the topic. The education team at the General Board of Church and Society creates seminars to answer questions, challenge assumptions, and open the group to reflection on the chosen issues. United Methodist Seminars take place at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill adjacent to the Supreme Court and the U.S. Capitol. Available at www.umcjustice.org.

Global Webinars are sessions with global diplomatic, academic, and interfaith leaders from around the world addressing important United Nations topics and initiatives. The webinars are sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society United Nations and International Affairs team from the Church Center for the United Nations across the street from the U.N. Headquarters in New York City. Available at www.umcjustice.org.

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